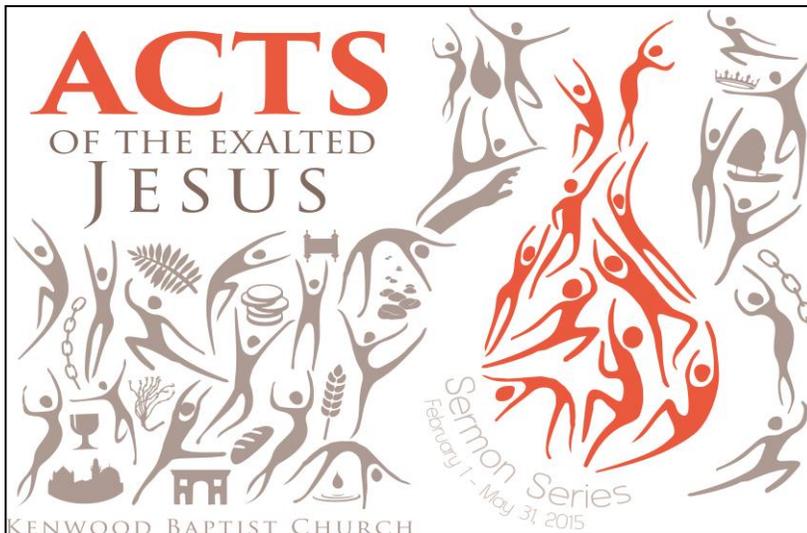


***Acts of the Exalted Jesus***  
Acts of the Exalted Jesus Sermon Series  
Acts 1:1-11;28:11-24, 30-31  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
February 1, 2015

**TEXTS:** Acts 1:1-11;28:11-24, 30-31

This morning as we begin our spring New Testament series at Kenwood, let's turn our attention to the Word of God, to the *Acts of the Exalted Jesus*. Throughout this spring we are going to



look at the Book of Acts, not primarily as the acts of the apostles, which it is sometimes referred to, but rather as the Acts of the Exalted Jesus Christ that He is doing in the world through His people. We justify this title from the very first verse of Acts, and we will look this morning briefly at the bookends of this great work, the opening paragraph and the final one, to understand Luke's intention

and to orient us to the series. In the opening paragraph of Acts, Luke starts in Acts 1:1 by saying that this book is really a second volume. He says:

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.”

Theophilus, meaning *lover of God*, was probably Luke's literary patron and friend. Books were expensive to produce in the ancient world and needed patronage. If we had no other knowledge of Luke's intention, if we did not have access to volume one of his two-part series, just this opening sentence of Acts should suggest to us the purpose of this book. He says his first book was about everything that Jesus began to do and teach.

Luke's second book is about everything that Jesus continues to do and teach in the world. He continues to act in the world to teach the nations, to draw them to Himself. This is the purpose of this second volume. Luke has written his works, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, to set before us the large picture of Jesus Christ at work, active in the world. Jesus began to do and teach in His incarnation, His public ministry, His death and resurrection, and Jesus

continues to do and teach this morning. He continues to do and to teach by acting in the world; He sits enthroned, as we will soon discover; and He instructs us in His ways. Luke continues with the assurance to his readers, including us this morning, that Jesus is alive. I remember a dear friend from years ago, and the only pictures she ever saw of Jesus were pictures of Jesus dead on the cross. As important as the cross is, it is critically important that in the iconography of Kenwood Baptist Church there is no one on this cross, that He has come down from the cross, that He has been raised, and that He is alive. The truth that He is alive changes everything. Luke wants to persuade us at the beginning that dead men do rise. In the case of Jesus, he knows that first century people are just as incredulous as 21<sup>st</sup> century people that dead people who have been crucified are actually alive now. He says in Acts 1:3:

*“After His suffering, He presented Himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive.”*

He was not a dream; He was not their wishful thinking. He was actually physically alive. He cooked them breakfast. Jesus served His disciples; He fed them; He showed them His wounds. He was actually alive, not a dream, not a spirit, and He was with them over 40 days, Luke tells us, and He spoke about what He always spoke about: the Kingdom of God and the reign of God. I was so drawn into worship this morning, the great Kingship of our God, that I lost it when we started to sing about God, to see Him on His throne, reigning. I don't know what happened to you during that song, but I just went in my mind's eye to heaven itself. I thought, “He is on the throne, now, this morning, over us, watching us, receiving our praise.” Jesus spoke about the Kingdom, that He is the King of that Kingdom, that the Kingdom of God had come in and through Him. Luke tells us in Luke 1:4:

*“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.’”*

Then Jesus reminds them in Luke 1:5:

*“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

Jesus explains the purpose and meaning of this baptism. His disciples asked the question in Luke 1:6:

*“Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

Jesus reframes this question on a global scope. He tells them in Luke 1:7:

*“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.”*

He tells them not to occupy yourselves with the rising and falling of nations, but rather embrace the missionary vocation to which they have been called. Sometimes as Christians we concern ourselves with other topics than our missionary calling, and we think those are the topics we

should be concerned about. Yet, Jesus says, “No, this is the topic.” What Jesus says in Acts 1:8 is the topic:

*“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.”*

Power, the power of the living God, will come upon you, the same power of God that we first meet hovering over the waters of creation in the opening sentence of the Bible: the Holy Spirit of God, God's indwelling abiding presence, His sanctifying presence. It is His presence that motivates our active and dedicated service to Him. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will come upon you, God's real presence, and as a result, you will be My *martyrs*, the Greek word. You will be My martyrs in the world. The word *martyr* means *a witness, to bear testimony*. In the public courts, in the arenas, in the workplaces of this world, Jesus says you will be My martyrs. Sometimes giving testimony to Jesus can cause you to lose your life, as we will see in this series. David Stevens reminded us last fall that if you die before you go, what is the worst that can happen to you? Jesus says to pick up your cross and follow Him. “You will be My martyrs, My witnesses,” Jesus says, and this is the missionary vocation that God gave to Israel. In Isaiah 43:12, the Lord says:

*“‘You are My witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘that I am God.’”*

We are His witnesses in the world. You and I are entrusted with the knowledge of who God is and what He has done in the world. We have a unique responsibility to communicate that and to share that wherever we go. You would not know Christ yourself this morning without past generations of faithfulness. Jesus says: “You will be My martyrs here in Jerusalem,” and then Jesus does something that only He can do. He stretches out the geography to the entire planet. I love having a zoom lens. My eyes aren't that great, so I really benefit from a zoom lens. I look through my zoom lens, and I can see. It is sort of amazing to see up close. It's wonderful, but I also love when you see the panoramic view, and you get the wide view.

Jesus, in His sovereignty, extends our vision and says: “You will be a martyr for Me, a witness for Me, here regionally and globally.” This is a challenge; this is a command of Christ to us as His followers. The implications of this are staggering. It means that there is no place on the planet, no place, no neighborhood, no family system, no ethnic group, that is outside the scope of Jesus Christ's dominion. In Psalm 2:8, the Lord says to the Messianic King:

*“Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession.”*

Isaiah 43:5-7 speaks of the Messianic King:

*“I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring My sons from afar and My*

*daughters from the ends of the earth--everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made."*

Jesus speaks with authority and power. As John Stott says:

*"God is a missionary God, and Jesus summons us into His mission."*

Isaiah 2:3 envisions this moment when the Word of God will go forth from Jerusalem and reach all peoples. Isaiah says it will be in the latter days that all nations will stream to Jerusalem. They will say:

*"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths."*

This is a massive charge, and it's a charge that is given only after Jesus says you be filled with God's abiding presence. This is not a duty that you can take on your own shoulders. It's too big; it's too fast; but when we hear the Word of Christ, when the Spirit of God is poured out upon us, something happens. We are empowered. We are empowered to serve Him, to remember His words, and to share Him in the world that we are in. Tim Dearborn, who has helped with casting the vision for World Vision and author in the *Perspectives* course that we are hosting this spring at Kenwood, has said this memorable line:

*"It is insufficient to proclaim that the Church of God has a mission in the world. Rather **the God of mission has a Church in the world.**"*

There is a universe of difference between those two statements. It's insufficient, he says, to say that the church, we have a mission in the world. Rather, it is the God of mission on His throne who has a church in the world, and we are privileged to be His instruments, His agents, but it is His mission, and He is entrusting it to and carry it out through us. The disciples must have been overwhelmed, as I sort of feel myself, and I hope you feel. This is overwhelming.

What happens next? Jesus, after He says this, leaves, it seems, and we think: "Wait, wait! If we ever needed You, it is now!" But, in fact, His departure is not an abandonment. His departure from their physical eyes is an enthronement. Jesus is taken up. He is enthroned. The cloud is not a cloud to hide His sight into the mists of heaven, but it is a cloud of glory, of heavenly glory, in which He is taken up and seated at the right hand of the Father. As His astonished disciples look toward heaven, two angels come and comfort them with the words we find in Acts 1:11:

*"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.'"*

So you see that our whole existence as the people of God exists underneath the Lordship of

Almighty God; it exists underneath His mission in the world; and it is the great privilege of our lives to be conscripted into His service. This spring we will trace the acts, of not ourselves, as our acts are small, even the greatest of them, but we will look, instead, at the acts of the Exalted Jesus Christ as He extends His kingdom in the world and uses us. He pours out the Spirit; He creates a new community as He extends His Kingdom. He does it through all kinds of means. He does it when we are persecuted; He does it when we have arguments with ourselves; He does it in a way that reconciles traditional enemies; He does it in a way that converts the highest level of society and the lowest. I love it that Jesus claims the makers of high culture and the makers of low.

The Book of Acts ends with a narrative of faithfulness to Jesus Christ. It ends with a note of assurance of His power, that He is a God who completes what He begins. Let's turn briefly to the final scene of Acts, in chapter 28. We will reach this destination together later this spring, but want to alert you to where we are headed. In Acts 28, the scene is so different from a group of trembling disciples in Jerusalem. In Acts 28, we are out on the sea, setting sail from Malta, having wintered on the island after a terrible storm, embarking on an Alexandrian grain ship. The worlds have changed. There is a figurehead of the twin gods of Castor and Pollux on the front of the ship. The Alexandrian ships were huge grain ships, 140 feet long, making the run to Rome in seven days. We find the Christian community aboard ship with the masthead of Castor and Pollux, gods known as the *Dioskouri*, the patron saints of sailors. There is a huge temple to Castor and Pollux in downtown Rome. It is the temple you see in pictures of the Roman Forum today, of the freestanding columns. That's the temple of Castor and Pollux. It's a world filled with idols, a world to which Christ is largely unknown, and yet the Christian servants are headed precisely towards it.



I was doing some searching this weekend on Castor and Pollux, thinking that nobody worships Castor and Pollux anymore in America. I couldn't find a shrine or a temple, but I did find that Castor and Pollux now is the name of a dog food brand in the United States. I haven't be able to figure why it's called that, but in some strange way I felt like that was a signal of an idol of our time. We are in a society that has lost its moorings, that sometimes gives more love and protection to animals than to our sons and daughters, a society that sometimes can't think of anything else to do but figure out another way to sell something. We have a context and a need to follow Christ in our context in our society. Acts ends with an image of faithfulness to this charge. The ship leaves from the island of Malta. They put in at Syracuse, land at Rhegium and proceed past the island of Capri, sailing

past the Bay of Naples, which was a wealthy resort area of the century. Paul sailed by the Bay of Naples and he saw in the distance Mount Vesuvius which would erupt 19 years later and bury



Bay of Naples and Mt. Vesuvius

the cities around it. They put in at Puteoli and headed towards the city of Rome, eventually walking along the Appian Way. Sections of the Appian Way can still

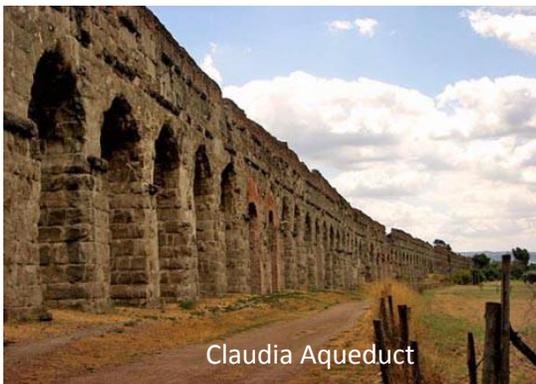
be seen today. It was called the 'Queen of the Great



The Appian Way

Roads,' and Paul and his companions walked toward Rome. They made it to the city and were met at the city gates by members of the Christian community. The final scene of the Book of Acts is as this small, seemingly insignificant, band

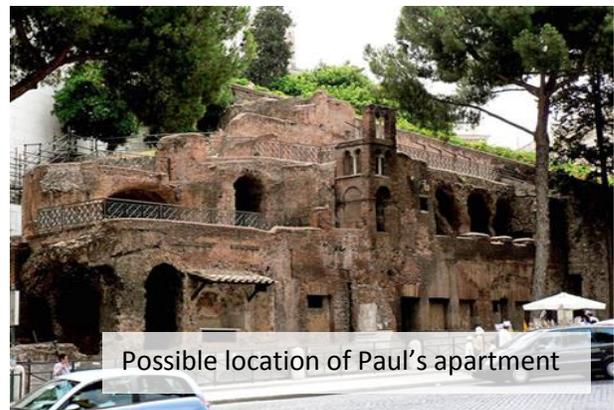
enters the most prosperous, largest, city of the world. Paul would have walked past the aqueducts of Claudius with the arches. Just the archways were 110 feet high. That's a large aqueduct. He came into the forum, and here are the ruins today in the fore-ground of Temple of Castor and Pollux, of a society without regard for Christ, a bustling metropolis, a city that was on the one hand known for great achievements and commercial success. On the other hand, contemporary writers like Sallust said that Rome was the common cesspool of the world, a city of vice, of idolatry, immorality. Whatever you think the challenges



Claudia Aqueduct

we face today are, they are really no different from the challenges of Acts.

We see that Paul proclaims Christ boldly in this place. He is placed under house arrest in an apartment in the city. This is the ruins of a first-century apartment complex, and that could have been Paul's apartment in the upper right. He was there for two years waiting to be tried, and yet he spent those years, those hours, proclaiming the Kingdom and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.



Possible location of Paul's apartment

As we begin this series this spring, we begin it with these two poles in view. We begin it with the power and authority of Jesus at the very beginning. He says: "You are My witnesses in the world of who I am and what I have done. Your witness is leading to this extension of Christ's dominion in all the earth." Luke ended his story with the center of the Empire. The Acts of Jesus continue beyond Acts up until the present day. The way that we arrive from Jerusalem to Rome is underneath the great power and authority of Jesus Himself, and I want to challenge you, as we begin, to immerse yourself in Acts this spring. Be in a small group. Maybe you are in the Perspectives course, but brace yourselves for what will happen to you when you are filled with the Spirit of God and represent Jesus Christ in your family, in your community, and maybe some of us will cross cultural barriers in obedience to Him. We know Christ today because of the faithfulness of those who took His word seriously, and that will be our sacred task this spring.

Communion:

As we prepared now to celebrate the broken body and shed blood of Christ, we come to the table with the words of the Apostle Paul who said: "*I received from the Lord what I delivered to you.*" That is a powerful statement: I received from the Lord what I delivered to you. What Paul received from the Lord and passed on was that on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it in the presence of His disciples and said: "*This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.*" In the same way, He took the cup after supper and said: "*This cup is the New Covenant in My blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me.*" Paul says: "*As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.*" We exist this morning as a body of believers who believe that Jesus died for our sins, that His body was truly broken, that His blood was truly shed, and that we are witnesses of these things, and that these things are true for all peoples of the world. As we prepare our hearts now to partake, hear Paul's admonition at the close: "*Whenever you eat and drink, you proclaim the death of Christ until He returns again in glory,*" as He promised in Acts 1:11. Would you prepare your hearts with me?

Lord Jesus, we extol You and we magnify You. I pray this spring, Lord, that You would speak powerfully to us who You are and what You have done, that You would help us to willingly embrace our vocation as a martyr in community, a witnessing community. Help us, Lord, to share our stories and to live our lives based on who You are. We love You, and we praise You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.