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ACTS

This morning I want to direct your attention to the book of the Acts of the Apostles as it is called in our English translation. And I would like to raise the question this morning why do we have the book of Acts. The only way of course to answer a question like this is by reading and rereading the book itself. There is not just one answer to the question as you will find as you go through this book, there are many answers and obviously some answers are more important than others. The book of Acts which I am sure most of you have read and many of you have studied is important because it not only gives us a history of the early church but it is a divinely inspired history. Now sometimes people ask questions about secular history and comparing it with what you find in Biblical history whether it is Old Testament History or New Testament History and the question's asked, Do you find such and such a thing in the Bible that you find in secular history? And it seems that we have in mind the idea that secular history is needed to confirm Biblical history. But if you stop and think for just a moment you will realize that that is just exactly the opposite of the way that we should be thinking. It's Biblical history that confirms all other history and so all other history stands or falls as it agrees with the history that we find in the Word of God. So this is God's divinely inspired history of the early church and all other early church history stands or falls to the extent to which it agrees with what we have in the book of Acts. It is in these chapters that we learn about the beginning of the church. We learn from the book of Acts about the work of the early church. We have in these chapters some of the preaching, samples of preaching that was done by the Apostles in the early church and by others. We see the opposition that the early church faced. We see its victories and we also see its defeats. We see that the difficulties of the church were internal as well as external. We see very clearly that the work of the Lord Jesus Christ did not stop with His death, with His resurrection or even with His ascension, that it not only continued but it grew and expanded until it spread throughout the whole Roman Empire even to Rome itself.

And I think anyone who reads through the book of Acts is perhaps impressed with the abrupt way in which the book of Acts ends. Sometimes that is explained and I think rightly so as indicating that the story of the church is not complete. The divine record is there but the history has continued right down to the present time. But it also seems when you read the book of Acts that it stops in that rather abrupt way when we have the record of Paul arriving in Rome because once he arrives in Rome we really have the full picture of the ministry of the early church. And Paul explained as you may remember when he wrote to the church at Rome before he ever got there that he was looking forward to being with them because of the fact that he had no other place to preach the Gospel where Christ had not been mentioned before and so he was looking forward to being with that group of believers, that he had never visited so that he might establish them even more in the Gospel of Christ. So we find some things in the book of Acts that are very very instructive and things which help us to understand the ministry of the early church. It's true as you read through this book that you find some things that did not continue even to the conclusion of the book. And I am thinking especially of some of the works of God, miraculous works that were performed. And yet this book will help us as much as any other book to make sure we are following in the steps of those who laid the foundation of the work that you and I are engaged in this morning as the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. But to answer simply, why do we have the book of Acts let me take the factors which the Spirit of God has mentioned just in the first two verses of chapter one and so if you have your Bible opened I would like to read these two verses although it doesn't complete the thought it begins the introduction of what the writer wants to tell us in this remarkable book. The first two verses read this way. The former treatise have I made O Theophilus, now this is the reason I asked Gary to read the first four verses of the Gospel of Luke because if you were listening carefully you would note that that book also was addressed to Theophilus and therefore when the writer mentions here that he had written a former treatise or literally the first treatise to Theophilus, he is referring to what we call

in our Bibles the Gospel according to Luke. And in describing that book he says that it contains all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the Apostles whom he had chosen. Now there are five things in these two verses that I want to emphasize this morning. Two of them are in the first verse and three are in the second verse and it has to do with Luke's purpose in giving us this remarkable book. The five are these, Theophilus and Jesus in verse 1. The commandments, the Holy Spirit and the Apostles in verse 2. Theophilus and Jesus in verse 1, the Commandments, the Holy Spirit and the Apostles in verse 2. And I realize that I have changed the order a little in the second verse in mentioning these things but I have a purpose for doing that as you will see. Now first of all let's think about Theophilus and it's significance with reference to the book of Acts, the fact that this is addressed to one man. It seems at least in past history, past church history when a man would write a commentary on a book of the Bible he would dedicate or address it especially to some distinguished person. You find this done a great deal in the past and the practice seems to have been taken from what Luke did because though the book of Acts is anonymous and the book of Luke is anonymous yet it has been generally agreed down through the history of the church that the Gospel which bears the name of Luke was written by Luke and that he also wrote the book of the Acts of the Apostles. One thing that we can be sure of is that whoever wrote Luke also wrote Acts because of the way in which these two books are introduced. But as we look at this book and the same could be said as far as the Gospel of Luke is concerned we don't need to be overly involved in trying to find out who Theophilus was because these are the only two times that Theophilus is mentioned in the Bible. What he did, where he lived, all is simply a matter of conjecture. What he did with the Gospel that was written to him and with this book of Acts we don't know, that is how it affected his life. What ministry he may have had. There are lots of questions that we can't answer about Theophilus since these are the only two occasions that he is mentioned. But the thing that I want you

to note about this this morning that has bearing upon our ministry today is that it seems to be very instructive, that the Spirit of God who directed Luke in writing both the Gospel and the book of Acts would address two books of the Bible covering the life of Christ and the history of the early church to just one man. How could the Spirit of God have possibly emphasized in any greater way the importance of instructing individual believers in the Gospel of God's grace and in the work of God than he has in addressing these two books to Theophilus, a man that we do not hear about again in Scripture. Now it would seem safe to assume that Theophilus not only read these but used them. But how he used them as I have indicated the Word of God does not tell us. But we are left here with the indelible impression that the instruction of every believer in the Word of God and in the work of God is extremely important to the Lord. Now if we are overlooking this then we are obviously grieving the Lord. And I hope that from this you will see that if the Spirit of God did this with Theophilus though he may have been and obviously was a prominent person yet the Spirit of God is just as concerned about you and me. Every child of God is responsible to know the Word of God and the work of God needs to be so carried on that our object, our purpose is to see that every child of God is instructed in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul when he was writing to the church at Colosse referring to the church said this and it ties in with the emphasis that I want you to see in Acts 1. Coming to the close of chapter 1 in Colossians Paul says this speaking of Christ and speaking of His ministry to the church, Christ whom we preach warning every man and the context would seem to indicate that he is talking about every believer and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus where unto I also labor striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily. Now from this we can draw the conclusion that it is important, extremely important for every child of God to know the Word of God and to know the works of God. Now secondly let's think for just a moment about Jesus. It's interesting isn't it that he simply calls the Lord Jesus Christ by the name that was given to Him when He came to earth. We have

read again, that is if you are reading your New Testament again through this year that statement in Matthew 1:21 For thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins. This was His human name and yet it conveyed in that human name the fact that He was God manifest in the flesh. Jehovah is salvation, the redeemer, the New Testament equivalent for Joshua in the Old Testament. But what does He say about Jesus. The former treatise have I made O Theophilus of all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which he was taken up. Now look at the word began. This word indicates that what began in the Gospels continues in the book of Acts. What the Lord Jesus Christ began when He was here on earth He continues to do from heaven. The work that He did on earth which is recorded for us in the Gospels is essentially no different from the work that He continued to do though in the book of Acts He is working through men instead of being visibly present on the earth. So all of the controversy and there is a great deal of it about the name of this book is settled in the very first verse of the book. It is not really the Acts of the Apostles. You have all the Apostles mentioned there in verse 13 of the first chapter but if you remember from your reading of the book of Acts when you go through the first 12 chapters have to do with the ministry of one Apostle by the name of Peter, the last 16 chapters have to do with the ministry of another Apostle who wasn't an Apostle at this time and his name is Paul. But as far as most of the Apostles are concerned the only reference that you have to them in the book of Acts is that which you find here in the 13th verse. So it doesn't seem that the term the Acts of the Apostles is really an accurate term. If we were to change that to say the Acts of two or three of the Apostles then we would get closer to the facts. But when you look at the subject that is given here it indicates that this is the book in which we are dealing with the continuing acts of the Lord Jesus. Now there are those who like to refer to the book of Acts as the Acts of the Holy Spirit and I certainly have no argument in fact I don't have any big argument with any of these titles that are suggested. But I am trying to get this morning to the very heart of this book. Obviously this morning

as the Lord Jesus Christ worked from heaven, the Spirit of God was at work on earth and as the Lord Jesus Christ during His ministry as these verses tell us worked through the Holy Spirit so He continued to work through the Spirit of God but the Lord Jesus was the one who began the work and the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who from heaven was continuing the work and if we want to bring this down right to the present day we see that when you look at the work of the Lord today and you want to get right back to the ultimate source of all that is vital, all that is lasting, all that has the marks of the very work that we see in the Gospel of Luke and in the book of Acts you have to recognize that the Lord Jesus is still the one who is doing the work. He began it when He was here on earth, as far as these things are concerned. And He is continuing this work up to the present hour. The plan that you see in the book of Acts for world evangelism was given by Jesus. And I want to use just His name in saying these things. The message that the church is to proclaim was given by Jesus. The wisdom and the power and the blessing that accompanies the ministry of the Word were also given by Jesus. And we will only be effective in our day as the servants of the Lord when we recognize this and enter into this and realize that the work is His, it is His will that must be done. It is His glory that we seek, it is His message that we must proclaim. Anything else is doomed to fail. So when you see something like this I trust that it will prompt you to pray and I desire the same thing for myself that the Lord will teach each one of us more and more about this so that we can see the effect of it in our own lives and in the work that the Lord has called us to do. The Lord began and thank God the Lord continues and the Lord is going to see His work through and we are simply entering in to that which God in His infinite wisdom has ordained that we should do.

Alright thirdly, the commandments. Now some of the commandments that were given had to do especially with the Apostles, there is certainly no question about that. In fact from our reading this morning you will notice in the fourth verse of this first

chapter that is being assembled together with them commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the promise of the Father which saith he, Ye have heard of me. Now we know from what we learned in the Epistles of the New Testament that we don't tarry today and wait for the Holy Spirit to come. The Holy Spirit comes to abide in our hearts the moment we receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior but the verse that you have or the statement that you have in the 8th verse is a verse which certainly applies just as much to us as it did to the Apostles as far as the principles are concerned, when he says, You shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me. Now for them it was beginning at Jerusalem, spreading out into Judea, going to the neighboring Samaria and then ultimately to the uttermost part of the earth. But the commission that has been given to us if I may refer to it in that way is to carry the Gospel to every creature and of course every generation, the world changes, every generation the world needs to be evangelized again. And we have the same message to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ to the uttermost part of the earth. But I want you to see since we are not talking specifically about details this morning, I want you to see this word commandment. As to their mission, as to their message, what the Lord Jesus Christ said to those Apostles and Disciples in the Upper Room is still binding upon every member of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the reason they are called commandments. They are commandments from which no child of God is excluded. Now the Lord doesn't call all of us to fulfill these commandments in the same way. We have many who have gone from our fellowship to other parts of the world to preach the Gospel in other languages and other nations. We who are here at home by the will of God have the same responsibility, the same mission to see that the people in our neighborhood, the people in our city and the people in our state and the people of our country hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But how carefully we ought to read this book when we see this. After the Lord had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen He ascended back to the Father and it was His will that these commandments binding upon His people should be fulfilled and

failure to fulfill them cannot be looked upon as anything but disobedience. So as we read through the book of Acts we want to see what the Apostles did, we want to see the priorities that they had. We want to notice the message that they preached. We want to see where their confidence was and dozens of other things that are taught us in the book of Acts but certainly one reason they have been written down is because if we were left to ourselves we would begin to get away from the basic mission and we would begin to stray from the basic message that we have been called to proclaim. The book of Acts is a book that ought to be digested and read and reread year after year by the people of God until the truths and the facts and the history and the ministry of this book is written upon our hearts in a way that we can never get away from. So the Lord gave commandments, this is something that we can't set aside then. This is not something that you receive or reject as you may feel about it. These are binding instructions upon the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. But then fourth, Luke writing here speaks about the Holy Spirit. The former have I made O Theophilus of all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which he was taken up after that, now notice this expression, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen. Now there isn't any reason from the standpoint of recognizing who the Lord was and how He was dealing with His disciples, there isn't any reason why this verse could not read in this way. Until the day that He was taken up after that he had given commandments unto his apostles whom he had chosen. But it says instead after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the Apostles whom he had chosen. Now there are many things about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world that we don't understand. It will always remain a mystery to us, as to how the eternal Son of God, the infinite and eternal Son of God could become a human being and as long as you and I live we are going to in our reading of the Gospels be seeing more and more clearly into these things as the Lord teaches us. But one thing we do know and you see it in the Gospel according to Luke that when the Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry, His ministry was initiated by His baptism and by the descent of the

Holy Spirit upon Him, it was the Spirit of God who led Him up into the wilderness to be tested. It was the Spirit of God who seems to have empowered the Lord Jesus in everything that He did, in His teaching in the performing of His miracles. Here we see the Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity. And by this the Lord Jesus Christ is setting the pattern for our ministry and even in His resurrection when He was raised from the dead. Here the Spirit of God tells us that when He gathered with His disciples after His resurrection to show Himself alive by many infallible proofs, even then it was by the Holy Spirit that He gave commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen. And I believe that while I read this verse the other way, I believe for reasons that I don't understand that it has to read this way. That you can't change this. That it was necessary for Him in the flesh to give those commandments to His Apostles through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Now why am I making such a point of this this morning. Because I want you to see that if the ministry of the Holy Spirit were vital to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ can anything less be true of you and of me. If the Lord Jesus on earth even after His death and resurrection ministered through the Holy Spirit then how much more important is it for you and for me to minister in absolute dependence upon that same Holy Spirit. Wasn't the Lord seeking to convey that to the hearts and minds of the Apostles when He said that you are to go and wait for the promise of the Father which saith he, ye have heard of me. And you shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you and then you will be witnesses unto me. Wouldn't it have been folly for the disciples to set out to fulfill this commission, to begin preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth, wouldn't it have been folly for Peter in his ministry or the Apostle Paul in his ministry not to have recognized that the Spirit of God had been given to them because there was no other way that could possibly serve the Lord effectively and fruitfully, that the Holy Spirit was there to guide them, the Holy Spirit was there to teach them, the Holy Spirit was there to empower them. And for them to set out on their own and ignore the Holy Spirit would have meant that the

record that you find in book of Acts never could have been written. Is it not to our own shame that so often we have attempted to do the work of the Lord, we have made our plans and established our methods and our procedures without a conscious dependence upon the Spirit of God that He is the one who must direct us and He is the one who must bless us and He is the one who must use us. And as the Lord Jesus Christ continues His work from heaven according to the book of Acts he is doing it in identically the same way that He did when he was here on earth and that is He continues to work through the Spirit of God. Do we think that our experience being this far away from the cross, that our gifts with our greater training which we seem to have in these days, the extent of our knowledge are substitutes for the Holy Spirit. Why did the Lord say as I have just read in verse 8 that the Spirit of God was going to come upon them, if the power and presence of the Spirit of God were not essential for the work that God had given them to do. When the Lord was with His disciples in the Upper Room before He went to the cross you remember He made that memorable statement which I am sure most of you remember, without me ye can do nothing. And as He gathered for the last time with His disciples, not only by what He said but by the very nature of His ministry giving commandments through the Holy Spirit He sought to set this before His disciples the fact that unless they ministered in the power of the Spirit of God, unless they were directed by the Spirit of God, unless the Spirit of God were using them, tremendous work they had been sent to do would never be accomplished. I wonder how well we have learned this. How well we are learning our utter dependence on the Lord. And unless the Lord by His Spirit uses and works and blesses in our behalf then our work is to no avail. What a need there is today for us to return to the Holy Spirit with all that that involves. No true work of God has ever been done, no true awakening has ever occurred or ever will occur unless the Holy Spirit of God is the one who has brought it about. Now let me come to my last point. And before I deal with this last point let me review with you for just a moment what we have covered. When you look at the history especially prepared for Theophilus you will

see that we have come to an emphasis upon Jesus upon the commandment or upon the Word of God and upon the Holy Spirit. And when you think of the Lord Jesus and when you think of the Word of God and when you think of the Holy Spirit there ought to be great encouragement in our hearts. We ought to come away from a passage like this with the ideas of the absolute sufficiency of God to perform what He purposes to do. Because He is able to accomplish it. You see in the Gospel of Luke what Jesus began, you see in the book of Acts what He continues and if you follow the history of the church right down to the present hour, all that has the blessing of God, all that is genuine, all that is going to remain, all that is going to bring eternal truth to the glory of God is what the Lord Jesus has been doing through His Word by the Spirit of God. There is a lot that goes on as Christian work that doesn't fall into this category but what falls into this category represents the true work of God. But the last thing that I mentioned that I wanted to talk to you about this morning is the Apostles. Now that's different isn't it. When you look at the Apostles and you see their relationship to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth, instead of looking at omnipotence and instead of looking at a word that is forever settled in heaven, instead of looking at the absolute sovereign power of the Holy Spirit when you look at the Apostles you are looking at men. Now they may be redeemed men but they are just men. And you have the same problem when you look at the Lord's servants today, when you look at any of us, you don't have to look very long to find out that we are just human beings that we will fail and we are frail and we are ignorant when we should be wise and we don't possess the knowledge that we should have and here is the amazing thing that the Lord takes these Apostles and other disciples up into the Upper Room and He speaks of what He is going to do by the Spirit of God through them. Now when you look at the expression that is used here you find that it didn't just happen that they were Apostles but as the Gospel of Luke for example teaches us these were the Apostles whom He had chosen. You know we have the expression I can't believe it! And when you think of the Lord Jesus deliberately calling Peter and Andrew and James

and John and they left their nets and began to follow Him and realize that they were Apostles not of their own choosing, not because they had made application and had passed some stiff test but they were Apostles because God had called them specifically into this work and you remember what you see of these and some of the others in the Gospel of Luke, the question immediately comes to your mind why was it that God would choose to do such a tremendous work involving His own glory and praise through such weak human instruments. Just this past week I talked to one of our people who was just overwhelmed with the feeling of unworthiness as far as salvation is concerned. I love to see that don't you. I don't like to see a child of God on his way to heaven feeling that God owed that to him and that if he gets glory well that's exactly what he deserves. All of ought to go crawling into heaven on our hands and knees just knowing that we are ~~not~~ ~~worthy~~ of the least of the blessings that God has given and sometimes as you think about the Lord's work today aren't you amazed that God is working through us, His instruments, His people, His servants. Couldn't God have done something better. Don't tell me as I begin the book of Acts that it is still the Lord's purpose to use Peter. Don't tell me that He is going to use James and John when James and John wanted to just call down fire from heaven. Don't tell me that He is going to be using all of these others. Couldn't have He done better. Why does it say unto the Apostles whom he had chosen. You know when anybody comes to me to talk to me about their unworthiness and about their needs and I have been there myself and I have been overwhelmed at times like this. But you know it is wonderful to be able to tell them you know the Lord knew exactly what He ~~was~~ getting when He saved you. There isn't anything that you do as a Christian that surprises God. He didn't choose you, He didn't save you thinking that He was getting more than He got. Psalm 103 says He knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust and I think it was Allen Redpath who says, God doesn't expect anything out of dirt. That's all he's gotten in us. We're just sinners saved by grace and when He saved us He knew exactly what He was getting. You read on down in the chapter about these two men that they decided to vote on, Joseph called Barsebes

and Methias, whoever heard of them. What have they got to offer the Lord. We don't have anything to offer the Lord except what He has given us and what He has done in our hearts but you see the reason that the Lord has worked in this way is that according to I Corinthians 1, go back and read the end of that chapter again beginning with about the 26th verse where Paul talks about our calling and you just look at what God has redeemed and chosen for Himself, look at the list and you will see that God has delighted to take the weak and the base and the things that are nothing in order that no flesh should glory in His presence and that He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. So when you think of the question why did He save you and why did He save me and why has He given us a part in such a tremendous work. The book of Acts gives us the answer. Because as you go through the Book of Acts and you read about the ministry of Peter in the first 12 chapters and you go on to the rest of the book and you read about the ministry of the Apostle Paul you don't come away from the book saying My what a marvelous person Peter was and how fortunate God was to have Him as an Apostle and how wise it was of God to choose such a smart person as the Apostle Paul was and one who was so diligent but I guarantee you that you will say two things. One is you will say as you read the ministry of the Apostle Peter and as you read the ministry of the Apostle Paul all praise goes to God who can take sinners and save them by His grace and use them like that. That is one thing that you will say. The other thing you will say is this. If God can use them then there must be some place for me. And the God who was sufficient for them, the God who gave His Holy Spirit to them, the God who gave His Word to them, the God who worked so faithfully through them is the God who can touch my heart and be my sufficiency and in these days when the world obviously is in such overwhelming need how wonderful to know that while we have to think of those weak human instruments that God has chosen yet we never have to think of them without thinking of Jesus and without thinking of His Word and without thinking of the Holy Spirit and without remembering that the Lord Jesus who began the work continues the work and is going to complete the work using weak, unworthy instruments such as we are in the

accomplishment of that so that when we stand in His presence in that last day we can stand there rejoicing that He is the one who has been sufficient for us all and He has accomplished the work to His own praise and to His own glory and not to ours.