

Title: What is An Apostle?

Text: John 20:21

Today, I would like to begin a series of message from the book of Acts. Acts is one of the great exciting books of the N.T. It deals with the beginning of the church. And I really believe that any christian will have a hard time understanding himself and the work of God in this present age, ^{unless} until he understands the book of Acts.

Now, today, I would like to begin with an introduction to the Book of Acts. So, would you take your Bibles and turn with me to the Gospel of John chapter 20 verse 21....John 20:21.....

(Read John 20:21)

Let's look to the Lord in a moment of prayer

I don't imagine that there is a single book that is as important to the understanding of every christian as the book of ACTS. My reasons are these:

(1) Number one, the book of Acts shows us the whole point of the Gospel.

What was it that the Gospels were driving toward? What was it that the Gospels were teaching us? What is it that we are to do with the message of the Gospels? The book of Acts contains that story and shows us the importance of the Gospels.

(2) Number two, this book is important because it deals with what every christian, if he is honest with himself, questions every day of his life.

And that is: HOW CAN I KNOW AND EXPERIENCE GOD'S POWER IN MY LIFE? Dear friends, the book of Acts is about the power of God. And it is essential that every christian understands the teaching of Acts to know how he can experience this power...to know how God works...and to know what it is that God wants from us. If you are like me, many times, I use to hear messages and I would ask myself: WHAT IS IT THAT GOD WANTS ME TO DO?

There are ways in which we can say: GOD WANTS YOU TO BE A MISSIONARY IN AFRICA...GOD WANTS YOU TO BE A LAYMAN OVER HERE IN ALAMEDA AND DO SO AND SO... But, when it comes down to it, you are going to live tomorrow and the next day. I am going to live MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY, and SATURDAY. And I cannot think of what next year might hold. Or, five years from now.....

Because I may not have those years to live. I only have today..So, every christian as he goes through his day is asking himself, whether subconsciously or directly, AM I EXPERIENCEING THE POWER OF GOD? AM I REALLY WERE GOD WANTS ME TO BE? AM I FULFILLING THE TASTK THAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO ME? WHAT IS IT THAT I AM TO DO?

I work, I have a job, I have a family, I have a home, I have bills to pay. I come to church. I try to hear the Bible. WHAT IS IT THAT GOD WANTS ME TO DO? WHY IS IT THAT I DON'T HAVE THE VITALITY THAT YOU READ ABOUT IN THIS BOOK?

And it is my purpose to show you that the book of Acts is for every christian. The book of Acts discribes in detail what it is that christians are to do. What is God's plan for us. And thus it becomes an essential, an important hook.

(3) There is a third reason why I believe Acts is important. And that is because Acts sets out in our minds and in our thinking the missionary plan of God. And it begins with every christian. And God discribes it in detail. How it starts and how it progresses. He discribes the workers involved. And he discribes their tactics and their methodis. And everyone of us in our world is a missionary whether we like it or not. You maybe a very bad one, or you maybe a very good one. But, everyone of us is a missionary. We have have been called of God for a specific purpose.

Let me put it very simplely before we start with the book of Acts. If if was God's only intention to take every christian to heaven, then why in the world does He not take us there the moment we ask Christ to come into our heart?.....Why is it that God has laid out a program and a plan that will ~~come~~ find its fulfillment in His return? What has he said about all this time up to that time when the rapture will take place? WHAT IS IT THAT CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE DOING? WHY DOESN'T ^{God} HE JUST TAKE US TO HEAVEN THE MOMENT WE ASK CHRI TO COME INTO OUR LIFE?

I really believe that Acts answers that question. I would like to challenge you to do something for me during this series if you would. I would like you to read through the book of Acts a multitude of times....

Maybe once a week. It would be very easy to do. It is only 28 chapters. Read through the book of Acts once a week. Some of you will take me up on that challenge. And I guarantee to you that the whole series, the whole message the whole purpose of Acts will come alive in your mind. It is through re-reading the text that I have come to believe in the principles of Acts. I have taught the book of Acts. But, just teaching the Book of Acts has never given to me the impact of this book like re-reading it..re-reading it. Continue to read this book as we study and I guarantee that this book will come alive.

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Now, let's begin by understanding this title. Look at the top of the page in your Bible. It says "THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES."

Some people have said, as is often in the marginal notes, that it should be the ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. NO..NO...the title in most of the manuscripts that was given to this book is THE ACTS OF APOSTLES.

The word "ACTS" is the word "to practice". In other words, it is the practices, the doings, of a particular group of people: called APOSTLES. That is the nature of this book.

Which brings us to this question: WHO ARE THE APOSTLES?

You cannot understand Acts, if you do not know who the Apostles are? Who are the Apostles? You say, I know who the Apostles are. They are the 12. Well, let's see for a moment

Will you turn please to Hebrews chapter 3 verse 1. Hebrews chapter 3 verse 1....."Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession."

O.K. WHO?.....Jesus....Any understanding of the Apostles must begin with this fact: Jesus is called "THE APOSTLE."

The ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. Jesus is called "THE APOSTLE."

And in the book of Acts it is a ministry. It is a commission. It is a work. It is a practice. It is a doing of THE APOSTLE himself, Jesus Christ THE PRACTICES OF THE APOSTLES.

Next slide please

Now, the word "APOSTLE" means "TO SEND". Literally, "to send forth." Forexample in its verb form you will find it ~~often~~ often in the Gospels. Jesus said on one occassion in John 20, "AS MY FATHER HAS SENT ME, SO HAVE I SENT YOU."

If you would translate that with the word "APOSTLES" which it is, Jesus is saying.."AS MY FATHER HAS MADE ME AN APOSTLE, SO I MAKE YOU APOSTLES."

The Apostle is always called the "sent one". The one sent from God. The word in its verb forms means "the one sent forth." Literaly..."to send"..and "from"...To send from something...to something..

Jesusa was sent from heaven and the Father to the world...WHY?...The Bible says in Luke 19:10 that "Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost."

The Apostles are "sent ones". Sent from someone to someone.

Now, will you turn back to Matthew chapter 10. Matthew chapter 10.... beginning at Vs 1...Matthew 10 verse 1...."AND HAVING SUMMONED HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES, HE GAVE THEM AUTHORITY OVER UNCLEAN SPIRITS, TO CAST THEM OUT, AND TO HEAL EVERY KIND OF DISEASE AND EVERY KIND OF SICKNESS. NOW THE NAMES OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES ARE THESE."

In Vs 1 it says that He called "THE 12 DISCIPLES". He had a lot of disciples. He called 12 unto Him. His 12. The 12 He called to be with Him, ~~as~~ it says in a parallel passage in another Gospel Jesus called these men to be with him.

Then we are told in Vs 2 "these are 12 apostles". The sent ones. And there names are given.

Now, look at Vs 5.."These twelve Jesus what"... "sent out"...apostles... sent ones...."THESE 12 Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, 'Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

12 disciples.....12 Apostles....

Now, turn, please to Acts chaper 13 verse 1...Acts chapter 13 verse 1. So, far we have learned that Jesus is "THE APOSTLE." And we have also learned that there is a group of men called "THE TWELVE". The 12 Apostles....

We have learned that the word "apostle" means "the sent one". "The one sent from someone to someone."

Now, Acts 13:1..Now, there were in the church at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; Barnabas, and simeon who was called Niger, and lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Notice, they were already involved in the work. They were either a Prophet or a teacher. That is clear from Vs 1. Five men are listed. They were prophets or teachers. Two of these men are called.

Vs 3.. "Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." The word "apostle" means "to send".

Vs 4... "So, being sent out by whom?...." the Holy Spirit, they went on their way."

Now, will you look over to chapter 14. Chapter 14... Paul and Barnabas had just finished preaching in the town of Iconium. They had had a little trouble and Vs 4 says.... "But the multitude of the city was divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the.... ~~WHAT~~"... THE APOSTLES...

Now, what am I trying to say?.... How many times have I heard people say, the only ones who are called "apostles" are 12 men. That is not true. Here are two men who were prophets and teachers in Antioch. They are called to be sent forth. And in Acts 14 they are called APOSTLES. Baranbas and Paul are Apostles. So, our list, now, is expanding.

Jesus was an Apostle... 12 men are Apostles... now, two more: Barnabas and Saul.

A lot of people, you see, have never seen Barnabas in this. They have only seen Paul. So, they take it that when Judas committed his act of betrayal and hanged himself. And when the disciples, the remaining 11 choose Maithas they were going against God's will. Because Paul was the Apostle that should have been choosen.

That is not true.... And the point is that there were more Apostles than just the 12.

Now, follow this carefully....Turn over to the book of ^Komans. Romans chapter 16...Romans 16 verse 7. Paul is writing to the church of Rome. And he is greeting certain people. Notice, please, Vs 7...."Greet Andronicus and Junias, my knsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are outstanding among the WHAT?APOSTLES..."who also were in Christ before me."

Here are two men who came to know Jesus before Paul ever did. And they are among the Apostles.....So, the list is increased by two more.

Now, I am not going to continue this. But I say to you that there is a whole list of people in the N.T. who are called Apostles.

There is Jesus who is called "THE ~~1~~APOSTLE". There are the 12 men. And there are many others mentioned includeing Barnabas, Saul, Andronicus, and Junias.

Now, turn back, please, to the book of Mark.. Mark chapter 16..Mark chapter 16 verse 14....

The question is: WHAT WERE THE APOSTLES FOR?...WHAT WERE THEY TO DO? You cannot understand Acts until you get this in your mind. WHAT WERE THERE PURPOSE?

Vs 14..."And afterward He appeared to the eleven".....Here is a post resurrection appearance of Jesus. He already arose from the dead. He has appeared to several people. And now he appears to the eleven. All the way through the N.T. you have the 12 apostles. And of course alfter Judas handed himself, you have the "eleven." A speical group. It is only the Apostles.

Some people have ask: Did Jesus appear to more people on the Mt. of Olives. No!! He only appeared to the eleven.

Back to Vs 14.....(READ VS 14-16)

Now, does Vs 16 teach that you have to be Baptized in order to be saved? Absolutely not.....if it did the last phrase would have to say.."but he who has disbelieved and has not been baptized shall be condemned."

(Read Vs 17-19)

Now, notice carefully Vs 20...."And they went out"...WHO WENT OUT?.... The eleven...."and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by WHAT?....."SIGNS THAT FOLLOWED".....

WHAT SIGNS?..The ones mentioned in Vs 17 and 18.

Now, why do I point this out?....I want you to note, carefully, the word "CONFIRM."..."Comfirming the Word"....And also the phrase "BY THE SIGNS". And to remember that Jesus gave these signs to 11 Apostles.

Now, will you turn, please, to Hebrews chapter 2. Hebrews chapter 2. Please stay with me. I will put it all together for you. Hebrews chapter 2 beginning at Vs 1.....

By the way, Paul is writing to Believers, here. He is not writing to non-believers. Although what He says in Vs 3 is true about non-believers. If you neglect God's plan of salvation for you through Jesus Christ, you will not escape God's judgment. But, he is really writing to believers. And follow this carefully...

(Read Vs 1-4)

What is the point of all of this? The point is that he is admonishing christians to not neglect to tell the Great Salvation. Because it was given by the Lord, himself. And then it was confirmed unto us, says the writer of Hebrews, by themthose who heard.

Now, who are those who heard?....Who were those commissioned by Jesus to go into all the world? It was the Apostles, commissioned by Jesus. Now, Paul is saying, "we heard them. The word was confirmed when we heard them."

HOW WAS IT CONFIRMED?....God bore witness with signs, wonders, and miracles. Those three words express the supernatural: healings, tongues... you name it

These supernatural gifts were on one group of people. WHO WERE THEY? THE APOSTLES.

The apostles had these gifts. WHY?...BEcause they were confirming the spoken word. When these men stood up to preach, how would the listener know that this was really from God? They did not have a book as we have, to open it up and to read about Jesus. They didn't have the Bible. So, how was the word confirmed? How did the Jews, who required a sign, know that this Gospele message was truly from God? God gave them signs. The Apostles had the ability to perform miracles. They healed people.

They spoke in tongues. They did fantastic things. They cast out evil spirits. WHY?....Because they were confirming the Word.

And if you follow this text carefully, it is saying that Christians, today, How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation?. Is that talking about our eternal life?...NO...It is talking about receiving REWARDS. Vs 2.. "receiving a just recompense or reward."

And the point is that God is evaluating every Christian as to what they are doing with the Great Gospel that was first given by the Lord. Then given to the Apostles who confirmed it with signs and miracles. And then given to others..LIKE: the writer of the book. Who says, "I heard it from them."

So, How can we escape? The judgement seat of Christ where we will stand and be evaluated for rewards. Not whether or not we will be in eternity. Because our salvation is secure the moment we ask Jesus to come into our hearts. But we will be there for rewards. This is one of the greatest texts you can use in comparing the work of the Apostles and how it affects us today. The work of the Apostles was to confirm the Word through miraculous signs. So that the world would know that this is of God.

And now, folks, the message to us is this: That the same command that was at first spoken by Jesus Christ to the 11 Apostles, that first command which they then confirmed with signs and miracles, has now been given to us as believers. And the point is that we are to take the message of salvation. For God will one day evaluate and reward us accordingly.

Now, come back to the book of Acts. The Acts of the Apostles. These are the practices of who? The APOSTLES...

Therefore I expect....Listen, carefully...I expect to find in the book of Acts the miracles signs. I expect to find them...WHY? BECAUSE IT IS THE PRACTICES OF THE APOSTLES.

And many people say, shouldn't we do those things today? Shouldn't we lay hands on people and heal them?

Not one example is it ever a command of a Christian, today, to heal anyone. That is right! The Bible tells Christians how God heals in this day and age. The instructions are found in James chapter 5

Christians do not have the direct power through their hands to heal. The Apostles did. They had the power. And they had it to confirm the spoken Word.

Now, what were the Apostles for? As we begin this text let me quote to you a passage. Please write it down. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20, says... "The Apostles and prophets were for the foundation of the church." The foundation of the church.

And in the heavenly city, in Revelation chapter 21, you will discover that there are 12 foundations to that beautiful new city that God has prepared for us. And this city has been prepared for the birds. Those who have accepted Jesus. This is the place that we normally call heaven. And there are 12 foundations. And what are the foundations? They are the names of the 12 Apostles.

You see, God's whole program in calling out a people unto himself, of building the great church which is the body of Christ, had to begin with Apostolic power given to them by Jesus, and they laid the foundation. And we are now building upon that foundation. We are stones of a great building that is preparing a habitation for God, himself. For every person who trusts Jesus in his life, God comes to live within them. God dwells in your body. And all Christians put together in this age, until the time when we meet Jesus in the air, all of us form one great body, one great building, for a habitation of God. To manifest his life to the world, through us. And we are being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

Some people have said, "What prophets?" Well, you will find prophets in the book of Acts. And they functioned ~~as~~ in the same way that prophets throughout the Bible have functioned. In the N.T. the prophets predicted the future. With no advanced knowledge they predicted the future.

The Apostles and prophets were for the foundation of the church. There are no more apostles and prophets today. There is a gift of prophesying which means to "proclaim." And many Christians have that gift. And God admonishes all Christians to seek to prophecy....to seek to proclaim the Gospel. But, the prophet is no longer in existence....

Now, one more text. Right it down. Ephesians 4:11...In Ephesians 4:11 we learn that God gave four gifted men to his church. Four gifted men: Number one was Apostles.....Number two was Prophets...Number three was Evangelists,....such as Timothy, Titus, and Philip mentioned in the N.T. And the fourth one was called a Pastor and Teacher. One office. Two functions: Pastor and Teacher.

And you will remember in Acts 13:1 those five men, they were Prophets and teachers. God is just starting the work. There are still prophets. And two of the five are called out to be Apostles. And the whole work of ACTS, THE PRACTICES OF ACTS, you are going to see miraculous things happen. Because they are confirming the spoken Word of the Gospel. It is coming with great power. It is coming with signs. It is coming with wonders. It is coming with miracles.

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