

Dear God - Lover

Acts 1: 1-3

Luke wrote two books to a man named Theophilus, whose name means God-Lover, or Loved-by-God. The books were the gospel of Jesus according to Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke. In Luke 1:3, Luke refers to Theophilus as “most excellent”. This indicates that he was in some type of high civil position of the Roman government. Some have suggested that by the time Luke wrote Acts, Theophilus either lost his governing position, or he simply became a member of the church. This is based on the observation that Luke does not address him as “most excellent” in Acts 1:1 but “O, Theophilus”. Though he was a real person we cannot help but notice the pun: Luke wrote both his first and second account to all the Theophiluses of the world – the Lovers of God, or to those who would become the Lovers of God through the ascended Jesus Christ.

As demonstrated in the outline of the first three verses, the ascension of Jesus is the central emphasis of a chiasmic structure. Luke wants us to understand that the earthly ministry of Jesus continued up unto the day He ascended into heaven. In Luke’s first account he wrote of everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day “in which He was taken up.” As the structure of the passage helps to point out, notice how the words “day” and “days” are used to explain one another. The earthly ministry of Jesus continued for 40 days after His resurrection till His ascension. Within those 40 days he commanded the Apostles through the Holy Spirit. The word “began” in verse one is significant because Jesus continued to work through His Holy Spirit. One commentator says, “As the gospels tell us what Jesus began to do and teach, so Acts tells us what Jesus began to do and teach by his Spirit.” The teaching of Jesus through the Holy Spirit would come to an apex on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection, 10 days after the ascension. During the 40 days leading up to the ascension Jesus gave many infallible proofs that He was truly alive after suffering death. The word suffering is singular in verse 3, which helps to emphasize that it was climactically death that He suffered.

For 40 days Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:2) then He returned to Galilee where he began His preaching and healing ministry in the “power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:12). Thus the ministry of Jesus began in Galilee and spiraled out to the rest of the local nation of Israel. They, being “men of Galilee” (v.11), spent 40 days with the resurrected Jesus. Then they returned to Jerusalem where they would begin their preaching and healing ministry in the power of the Spirit after Pentecost. Instead of beginning their ministry in Galilee, they would begin their ministry on the literal Mount Zion of the earthly Jerusalem, even in an upper room. For that point the fountain of grace would flow from heaven to the ends of the earth. As Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12). In Acts 1, Luke demonstrates how the Apostles would do these “greater works” than Jesus because He went to His Father. The Apostles would take the kingdom of God well beyond the territory of Israel, even to the nations.

This is the first of many ways that Luke will show how the acts of the Apostle are like the acts of Jesus. The life of Christ set the pattern of what the disciples would do in a

much greater way. The physical body of Christ set the mode of operation for how the corporate body of Christ should function, especially in carrying the burdens of a cross.

Notice the emphasis on the apostles in the first three verses. Christ commanded the *apostles*, He chose *them*, presented Himself alive to *them*, *they* heard Christ speak of the Kingdom of God, and *they* saw the many infallible proofs. The word for “infallible proofs” was used in legal language for “proof of which there was not getting away, an indication which is irrefutable and indisputable.” Again notice how the outline helps to emphasize that Christ taught of God’s kingdom before His death (v.1b) and even after His resurrection (v.3c). For this reason the church, being the kingdom of God, is affirmed in the Nicene creed as an “apostolic” church. The church is founded upon the teachings and writings of the apostles with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

Scripture later affirms that the gospel was first spoken by the Lord and confirmed to the apostles. Hebrews 2:3-4 “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” The person who neglects the teachings of the Apostles, yea the church founded upon their greater acts and writings, will not escape the greater judgment of God. For this reason the lovers of God love the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One thought that is hard for us to ponder is that Jesus ascended so that the church would do “greater works” than Jesus did in the flesh. Sometimes we think that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was merely the high point of redemptive history. Well, it was in the sense of how God accomplished redemption, but not in the sense of how God actually applied that redemption to the world. In regard to redemption’s application, the Apostles did a greater work than Jesus did in the flesh. They started from Jerusalem, not Galilee. They would take the kingdom of God to the nations, not just the nation of Israel. Therefore the acts of the Apostles, in applying God’s grace to the world, were greater acts than Jesus. As a father desires his children to do greater works than himself, even so Jesus the “Everlasting Father” (Is.9:6) desired the children of his church to do greater works. Therefore, Luke moves from glory to glory, as he records his account of Jesus and his account of the Apostles.

Jesus ascended to heaven to mature His people on earth to a greater degree of glory in this life. Jesus was the human forerunner into heaven’s highest throne, therefore His new humanity would spread to all regions of earth. This is the same hope that we can have today, that the Lord’s church grows, not only in number, but in greater works from generation to generation until “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Is. 11:9).