

“Jesus 2: The Sequel”

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First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Acts 1:6-11

As many of you know, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same person. Acts is kind of a sequel to Luke. We not only know this by comparing writing styles, word selection, and grammatic structure, but because they are written to the same person in a sequence. Acts starts out “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up to heaven.” Which means we know there was a first book. The Gospel of Luke was also written to Theophilus. Now we know which Gospel was his. Now Theophilus means "friend of God" or "loved by God", so Theophilus may have been an individual person, or it may mean that Luke and Acts were writing to you and me, for we are “friends of God” who are “loved by God”. At any rate, the bridge between Luke and Acts is Jesus’ ascension. Luke ends with Jesus being “carried up into heaven” and Acts begins with the disciples watching as Jesus, “was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” and into heaven. That story makes sense as the bridge because the Gospel of Luke is all about Jesus’ life: His birth and infancy, a story about His childhood, His baptism and ministry, His teachings and healings, His death and resurrection. That is Jesus 1 – God coming to earth in the form of a person. Acts begins Jesus 2: the Sequel – the continuing ministry of Jesus after He was taken up into heaven when He is no longer confined to a physical body. While a human, Jesus was confined by time and place – He could only be in one place at a time. In the sequel, with Jesus at the throne of God, Jesus no longer suffers these limitations. Though absent as a physical character in Acts, Jesus’ presence is unmistakable. His name occurs at least 69 times in Acts. He is the center of the challenges with Jewish authorities. He defines and guides the missionary effort and He is the power behind the disciples’ ability to perform miracles. Jesus is now free to work beyond space and time. And that is what the book of Acts is all about.

But here at the beginning of Acts, is the question, “What is that going to look like? Without Jesus being physically present, how is Jesus 2: the Sequel gonna work?” The disciples want to know. They ask in v. 6, “Lord, is this the time when You will restore the kingdom to Israel?” A good question. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies of Israel being re-establish to its former glory as in the days of Kings David and Solomon – the financial, cultural, and military center of the region. The problem is with the coming of Jesus, the people of God are no longer limited to Israel. God’s people are no longer defined by citizenship in one nation or another. God’s people are found in Israel, Jordan, France, Iran, Mexico and America. There are other problems too. Jesus responds to their question about restoring Israel in verse 7, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

Jesus' answer doesn't really answer their question, but rather reorients their thinking. First by saying, "Nonya, none of your business." Don't pretend to know God's timing and God's agenda. For 2,000 years now people have been pretending to know God's timing and God's agenda about when Jesus will return and what that will look like. For 2,000 years they have been wrong. But there is more than that. Look closer at Jesus' reply. They ask, "Jesus are You..." – are you going to restore Israel? Jesus replies, "You will..." – you will be my witnesses. Notice the difference there. They were looking for Jesus to do something for them, to serve their interests, to be their servant. Jesus says, "No, it is your turn. I have already done everything for you. I have given my life for you. It is your turn." They wanted Jesus to proceed on their timetable, but Jesus said that God is in charge of the schedule, not them. They focused on the restoration of their country, but Jesus was focused on their witness to the world. They wanted the Kingdom to come into their own lives, but Jesus wanted them to spread the kingdom all over the world. They wanted to be kings so that their will would be done on earth; Jesus wanted God to be King so that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Their agenda was getting themselves and their country back on top; Jesus' agenda was getting God back on top. Later on in Acts 17, the people of Thessalonica bring charges against Paul and Silas and those helping them saying, "These people who have been turning the world upside-down have come here also." I love the accusation – "they have been turning the world upside-down." But they have it backwards. They are turning the world right-side up again. In an upside-down world, the almighty, creator and sustainer of the universe is here to serve me, to help me with my plans and help me reach my goals. God will judge everyone who agrees with me as faithful and everyone who disagrees with me as evil. God helps me have an easy, conflict free life because everything just kind of goes my way. Me on top, God serving and supporting my agenda. That is upside-down. Jesus wants us to turn it right-side up again. God on top, with you and I serving and supporting God's agenda.

Things change in Jesus 2: the sequel. In Jesus 1, Jesus is God come to earth for you: to reach you, touch you, save you, and bring you home. Jesus 1 is for you. But in Jesus 2: the sequel, Jesus is **in** you. The One who came to serve and reveal God to us is now in us, but the purpose has not changed. God is there for a very specific reason. To empower us to serve and reveal God to those around us. Just like Jesus 1 did. In Jesus 2, Jesus is no longer limited by time and space, but by the fact He has no hands, arms, feet or voice. He can be everywhere at once, but needs to use someone else's voice to share how much God loves us, someone else's hands and arms to hug and serve, -someone else's feet to get Jesus there. In Jesus' words, "You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." You will be my witnesses, starting in Jerusalem, or rather, with where you are. Start right here in church. We want to hear your story. We want to hear how Jesus has touched your life. We want to hear it in conversations and in our classes. Start where you are. Then Jesus says go to Judea and share. Judea is where they were comfortable. Where they still felt at home. That would be at home, at work, wherever you gather with family and friends. Make Jesus a natural part of those

conversations. That is why Jesus is in you. Then from Judea to Samaria. Samaritans were their enemies. Jesus' life in Jesus 1 was not easy. They tried to stone Him and throw Him off a cliff before they finally put Him on the cross. Serving others and revealing who God is is not always easy. That is why Jesus 2: the sequel is all about Jesus in us, giving us the power to do what we cannot do on our own. Then finally to the ends of the earth – to those people you don't even know, who are probably very different from you.

In Jesus 2: the sequel, Jesus' followers move beyond the proof of Christ's risen body to the promise of His presence in their bodies. A presence that turns ordinary people into witnesses for Jesus. But as the sequel tells us, the promised power is not the power of persuasion—or even protection. It is the power of discernment and courage. It is the power to turn the world upside-down, and thereby turn it right-side up again with God on top and creation serving their creator, redeemer and sustainer. We live in a world that is upside-down, and none of our attempts to change the world will restore the peace and justice of God until the world is turned right side up and God is King again and we are His willing subjects. It is time to turn this world right-side up, and let it begin with me.

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