

Intro to Acts | Tom Grass

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Preacher: Tom Grass

[0:00] Good morning. There's some handouts here. A couple of guys want to pass them out. Open in prayer. Lord, we ask You to guide us this morning in Your Word.

! The authority of Your Scripture is what we rest on, not on the speaker. And open our hearts. As was mentioned in the first meeting, Gary said, if you really embrace what God does and He squeezes you with His love, sometimes it's hard to even speak.

These couple of songs are really good. We just do look forward to Your coming, Lord. We see in the book of Acts where You start launching out Your plan into the world.

We're just lucky to be partakers of that. Guide us in Your Word and our study of Acts as we launch into it this fall. In Jesus' name, Amen. I...

28 chapters. History of the church, if you will. What do you do for introduction? I don't know.

[1:10] But yet, here I am. I'm going to do it. And we take turns at Bethel speaking, so it's my turn. Usually in the fall, I get one couple of the guys hunting fish in the fall, so I end up speaking one of these days.

And by the way, there are some guys fishing and hunting this weekend, and I expect next week. We should have some lunch, food, don't you think, guys? What do you say? If they're watching online, some deer and some fish would be nice next weekend, but probably not going to happen.

And there are some young people gone. I imagine there's some at college and career. Is that right? Down at Turkey Hill. So, not a whole... Some people are out. That's fine. I have one joke as we do the book of Acts, and if you're...

Some of us may remember this. What kind of car did the disciples drive? An accord.

They were all in one accord. Isn't that true? You can find that in Acts 1, verse 14. If you read the ESV, the New King James, and the King James Version. What I'd like to do this morning is do about 15 minutes of introduction to Acts, background, Luke, things like that, and then maybe 15 minutes of instruction and teaching and challenging us, and a little bit of meddling.

[2:31] I will tell you right now, I'm going to meddle. I'm going to poke you a little bit. I'm going to prod you. I'm going to encourage you. Just so you know, it's coming. And you can leave now if you want, because I'm going to say a few things that you're going to say, well, I don't do that.

I'm like, I know. But you don't answer to me. You answer to the Lord. And I just want you to know that, and so do I. And even if my words say one thing in my heart sometimes, I'm not there either. Okay? So it'll make sense maybe at the end. So important when you study the book of Acts is that you have a map, and you understand the background, and you kind of look at it.

Next week we do chapter 2. So you really want to start reading through it if you're going to really glean from it. You can come and just partake. But if you really want to get what's in the book of Acts, you've got to dive in a little bit.

But I'm going to go fast in the introduction part. It's written by Luke, who also wrote the Gospel of Luke. It's a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, and Luke says he wrote it to this guy named Theophilus, who legend or history will tell you that he probably was a man of some kind of political office or something like that.

[3:49] The name Theophilus means friend of God. Some interesting facts about the book of Acts. There's more than 96 individuals are mentioned by name.

There's 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 Mediterranean islands mentioned. The three key cities are Jerusalem, Antioch of Syria, and Rome. One-fifth of the book is accounts before Roman officials. That's crazy. That's crazy. You just don't think about it. One-fifth of the book is people testifying before Roman officials. One may conclude that Luke wanted to show the Roman officials of that day that Christianity was a non-treasonous, non-rebellious, non-troublemaking group.

Interesting thought, isn't it? Jesus was convicted of treason. Paul was in prison. Every time the Christians are in court before a Roman official, they conclude they see nothing wrong with them. Wow, nothing wrong with what you're saying. The end of the book of Acts ends that way. I think it's before Felix. You know, you guys can read into that. There's a lot of references on your handout there.

[4:58] I think the epistles would confirm that we be honorable before men. Romans 12, 18. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

1 Timothy 2, 1-4. First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and for all those in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

This is good and is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. That is our prayer. However, in today's society, I could go off right now, right?

Right now, I could go off on that tangent. But that's what we pray for. Live a godly life before these people that we're around. Luke's two books make up more than all the New Testament by length than any other offer.

If you go like volume, you know, sentences, chapters, you know, it's the largest. Luke is referred to as the beloved physician in Colossians 4-14.

[6:07] He is a companion of the Apostle Paul and the first historian of the early church. Luke was with Paul through a good part of Paul's ministry, including Paul's second, third missionary journey, and his imprisonment in Rome.

Luke wrote his gospel in the early chapters based on eyewitnesses' accounts. So he interviewed people who were there with the Lord, some say even the mother of Jesus, and wrote his accounts. So the first 15 chapters of Acts are based on eyewitnesses' accounts.

Somewhere in Acts 16, we see where Luke's writing will change. He says here in Acts 16, he goes in verse 6. It's Acts 16, 6-10.

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And then, in verse 10 it says, And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

See, this flipped the transition. In Acts 16, Luke goes from they to we. He is with them for the rest of the book. One more emphasis.

[7:25] In Acts 1-16, there's more of an emphasis on the Holy Spirit than the rest of the book. After Acts 16, the focus becomes a ministry of who?

The Apostle Paul. That's God's choice why he did that. Typically, this book is called the Acts of the Apostles. You may open up your book, your Bible in the front.

It might just be called Acts. Acts of the Apostles. I wrote in my study Bible, Acts of the Holy Spirit. But this past couple of weeks, I came up with a different title for myself.

And it was listening to John MacArthur's introduction. And, you know, he called it something, Acts of God. You know, I think a good title would be the Acts of the Triune God.

Think about the book of Acts. What happens? He takes the writings of the Old Testament. The preaching in the New Testament is a lot of the Old Testament scriptures, Psalm 2.

[8:27] And there's many other places. And these apostles who didn't understand all that, and these disciples, are preaching out of the Old Testament the things speaking of Christ. So you've got the Triune God.

You've got God the Father. You've got the Holy Spirit baptizing people. And they speak in tongues. And the indwelling Holy Spirit. And then, of course, you have the clarifications of the teaching of Jesus, right?

So you've got to kind of have all three. The Triune God present in the book of Acts. I think if you listen to the book of Acts or read it, you'll see what I'm saying when you go through it. And I think it's an important point.

It's kind of my own little thing, you know, my takeaway, if you will. Think about Paul on Mars Hill. He said, I saw an altar inscribed to the unknown God.

And then he goes off. And then that song we sang, the first one, talks about things that you can read there in Acts 17. And he talks about creation and the man and how we're all one with God and all that on Mars Hill.

[9:33] And then you go into Ephesians and Paul in Acts 19. And listen to this. Paul says, I mean, Luke records this in Acts 19. It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.

There he found some disciples and he said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believe? And they said, no, we've not even heard there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, then what were you baptizing? He said, John's baptism. And then Paul said, John baptism with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who has come after him.

That is Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hand on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. Mars Hill to the unknown God.

Ephesus, John's baptism. Jesus' account. The Holy Spirit. You see what I mean about the triune God being present in these scriptures? One of the other things that's interesting about the book of Acts is think about, let me see if I put it in the right order here.

Think about something else that goes on in the book of Acts. You know, you've got all these people, all these places, but think of all the things that come up. There's miracles, there's signs, there's a murder, there's plots to murder, there's espionage, there's persecution, there's shipwreck, there's trials before magistrates, there's riots in the streets, there's breakups among believers, Paul and Barnabas and John Mark, there's heresies, there's false teachers, sorcery, demon possession, radical conversions.

[11:20] What a book, you know? There's sailing ships, nautical language, Roman citizen by burp, demanding his right, rights and liberties as a Roman citizen. There's geography. You know, you've got Israel, Jerusalem, Antioch, Athens, Corinth, Crete, just to name a few.

Rome, you know? What a book. What a book. And the author, Luke, you know, he's a physician, so when he talks about healings and miracles, he talks about the palsy, he describes it, the broken leg, he describes it.

Then you get the nautical stuff that Luke writes, you know, when we set sail like this, Acts 28, verse 11 to 13, After three months, we set sail on a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead, putting in at Syracuse.

We stayed there for three days, and there we made a circuit and a ride at Regium, and after a day, a south wind sprang up, and on the second day, we came to this other city.

Pretty cool. Pretty cool. I'm not a sailor, but that's pretty cool. So as we go into Acts, enjoy it too, right? Enjoy the riding. I think it's really going to be fascinating.

[12:36] But it's, you have to do this on your own, because you're only going to be here for 20 minutes, 30 minutes of a message, but if you want to really enjoy Acts, dig into it yourself, you know?

Listen to this one, Acts 16. This is in the marketplace. It was going to the place of prayer where we were met by a slave girl who had a spirited divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

She followed Paul and us, crying out, These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. That sounds great, but she was irritating to Paul.

And finally he turns around and he says, After much time, many days, it says that she did this. And finally Paul says, I command in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, come out of her.

And the Spirit comes out of her at that very hour. I mean, whew! I mean, this is better than clicking on Netflix or something, maybe. I don't know. I mean, it's pretty exciting.

[13:32] I mean, if you step back and look at it. But then you get the guy's reaction. And then there's actually almost like this riot in the streets, you know? They throw him in prison.

Paul gets beaten unjustly one time and he appeals to Caesar, right? That's how... Because he's a Roman citizen. Could you imagine being a Roman soldier with not a Roman birthright? Beating a Roman citizen who has more rights than you. And they go, whoa! You're a Roman citizen? And I just beat you or threaten to beat you. All these things are going on in this book. And it's really pretty fascinating.

It's like a fire hydrant up here. I'm sorry. The book begins in Jerusalem as the apostles and disciples wait for the coming Holy Spirit as promised to the Lord. And Acts 2.21.

It shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Woo-hoo! Wow. You could read the other ones listed there. Acts 28 ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome for two years.

[14:39] So these guys...

Okay, so I'll just read part of this. Verse 23 of Acts 28. When they had appointed a day for Paul to come before the courts, they came to his lodging in great numbers.

Actually, it's like the Jewish leaders are coming. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God, and trying to convince them about Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets.

And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. Paul's response to these Jewish people, The end of Acts says, Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.

That's us. They will listen. David last week shared out of Matthew 28, 18-20.

[15:46] The Great Commission we call it. In Acts chapter 1. Right before Jesus' ascension, these are the words that we read. Acts 1-8.

But you will receive power, and the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. And this is kind of like, could be also an outline of the book.

It could be what we see happening in Acts. You could also divide the book by way of introduction. You could divide it by cities. Jerusalem, Antioch, Assyria, and Rome.

You could split the book up that way. Now I'm going to meddle. What verse do you think I'm going to preach on? Out of Acts.

Out of Acts. I'm going to pick one. It's on your list. Acts 2-42. Does anybody know that? Alright.

[16:43] They continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. Huh. What was the early church's focus?

Four things. If you remember, there was years ago, people would have a, I remember learning this a long time ago, a wheel with four spokes.

And the four spokes are these four things. Apostles, doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Now if you have a four-spoke wheel, and one spoke is broken, what do you have?

Broken wheel. It's not going to work quite right, individually and corporately. The apostles' teachings. For us, it's the teachings mostly found in the epistles.

We also should be students of the whole revelation of God found in the Bible. We should understand Genesis, which teaches the building blocks of life and society. We should know our Bible.

[17:44] We need to read and listen to it. Yeah. Amen? Yeah. 2 Timothy 2.15. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

You need to learn this. You need to be a student of it. I like my old study Bibles. You need one. You need something you can write in and mark up and come back to and have your notes in it. You know, things will come up and I'll go, you know, I got a note about that. You know, I want to show you.

That's two pages in the book of Acts that means something really important to me. It's really specific about why it's highlighted in orange. And it's a, I could go on about that. Colossians 3.17.

Corporately, we're all believers in Christ. Yes? Yeah. We are united because of what Christ did for us. And we're dependent on one another for our nutrition, our encouragement.

[18:57] Right? Colossians 3.16 says, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.

Singing psalms and hymns with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Gosh, take that one in. Mark it on your paper.

It's written down. Colossians 3.16. You can look at the other ones. Years ago at the Believers Conference in St. Louis, there was a guy named, I think it's Dr. Garns.

Is that right? Barnes. Which is it, Nicky? Oh, he came and spoke to us at Believers after the conference. And he was a medical doctor. Pretty big guy.

Booming voice, kind of. He spoke at the Believers Conference. And this was a long time ago. And he was in medical school and became a medical doctor. And I don't know anything more than that about his background.

[19:56] And he was in medical school and he was asked the professor, How do I take all this in? You know, medical doctors, they go through four years of regular college. And then they go four more years.

You're a PhD, right? It's a lot of study. A lot of study. And he's in a biological field. I mean, it's a lot to take in. And the professor, I remember this guy saying this.

He goes, Garns, you've got to dig it out. I will never forget that. I haven't. So I probably won't until I have mental problems. Garns, you've got to dig it out.

If you want anything in life, what do you got to do? You got to dig it out. And that's really stuck with me. If you want to learn your word, the word, you've got to dig it out.

I'm not always that guy. I can say it right now. I'm not always that guy. Okay. The apostles' teaching. Dig it out. Fellowship. Fellowshiping with other believers, it's a must.

[20:59] It's not just chit-chat, chit-chat, chit-chat like we tend to do. I'm sorry. We don't really live the Christian life alone. You're not called to that. You are not called to do this alone.

I believe God uses availability more than ability. There are times in my Christian walk, and I'll come to Wednesday night youth group. This happened about three weeks ago.

I can't remember the specific night. And I was in no position to be there in my mind, right? No, you ever show up to a meeting, to a youth event. I'm not prepared to be there. I don't want to be there. I'd rather stay home. I'm calling out. All that. It's 40 miles away. I don't want to come. I was so blessed that night. By what Kevin shared and what we did with the young kids up here.

And you know what? It's because I came. It's because I showed up. I always say to young employees when I was supervising people, I said, 95% of the job is showing up.

[21:57] Show up. Come in. Then once you're there, you can do your job. I think serving each other is a type of fellowship, too.

So when you're here, serve each other. We do that a lot because we're a small group. We serve each other a lot. We do a lot at Bethel with a small amount of people. I found this description of fellowship.

It denotes a deep, intimate relationship. This fellowship is not merely social but spiritual, involving a shared life with Christ Jesus. It reflects the unity and communion believers have with Christ, akin to the vine and branches metaphor in John 15.

This fellowship is both a present reality and a future hope, as believers are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. We talked about John 15 here recently.

The fellowship with Christ, the fellowship with one another, and our future fellowship with God and glory with all of you. We should experience some of that now. 1 John 1.3 The triune God wants to have fellowship with you and me, individually and corporately.

[23:19] We are special, called-out people. I don't embrace that like I should. I'm not there. Tomorrow I won't be there.

I know it. Wednesday is going to be hard. Right? You know what I mean by that? Today, sitting here, it's okay. I can say all this. Four or five days from now, nine days from now, I don't know. I don't know. Today I'm there. Galatians 2.9 Paul wrote, In recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, the pillars in Jerusalem, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and them to the circumcised.

Does that sound like division? Does that answer the question? Does that sound like division? No, they gave them the right hand of fellowship. You know what?

You stick there and you pound it out with the circumcised. We're going to go to the Gentiles. I don't know what that looks like. You look at that map. Look where Paul went. It's amazing. We don't even

hear about Thomas and Philip and all those guys.

[24:34] What happened to them? The New Testament, for whatever reason, is silent about that. I have my own theories. I know those guys went out. Someone went out.

But that's another thing. Breaking of bread. You know I pound on this all the time when I get a chance. We have a breaking of bread meeting. We have three meetings at Bethel, right? Nine o'clock, breaking of bread. I would say 8:55 is breaking of bread. That's a whole other discussion. So you're ready at 9. Boy Scouts say to tell you if you're early on time, if you're on time, you're late.

If you're late, there's no excuse. I'm meddling. I know. It's hard. Sunday mornings, Gary, Vineyard, and Bev had four kids close together. And we used to fellowship with them at a church.

And we used to call it the Vineyard Morning. And I think David's living it now. He occasionally has a Vineyard Morning. You wake up Sunday morning. You're trying to get four kids ready to go.

[25:31] In our case, it was five. And it's 8 o'clock. You're trying to leave. You're supposed to be there by 9. And everything unravels. And we called that a Vineyard Morning for years.

And Gary and Bev are noted to have turned around on their way to church because they couldn't calm down. Can you imagine that? I can imagine that.

Breaking of bread. Bethany Bible Chaplain in Cedar Falls, Iowa, on their website, describes their breaking of bread in this way. The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast. Who doesn't like a feast? Do you? The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast. Instituted by the Lord Himself exclusively for His own people.

Holy cow. What an intimate offer. That is a great statement. Those who have been saved by grace through faith in the complete and finished work of Jesus Christ are encouraged to come.

[26:38] A couple weeks ago, Ed shared about his father-in-law praying openly in a restaurant. Ed, that warmed my heart. Others should stand up and tell us that kind of thing.

My father-in-law, who didn't believe. Nikki's dad complimented me on sticking with Nikki. And being there for her. And he became a believer. And he prayed openly in a restaurant, loud enough that others could hear.

That blessed my heart. That hardened, callous, tomgrass heart. It's penetrated by those words. You know? And I think if you come at 9 o'clock and have something to share, you should have something to share.

It's inconvenient. It's early on a Sunday morning. Your kids, if you have little kids. Your dog's going to get out on Sunday morning. It's going to run.

You know? Stuff's going to happen. You're going to have an overflowing sink or something. Your car won't start. Well, guess what? Leave 20 minutes early. So you're ready.

[27:45] I know. I'll stop. An hour early. Okay. Okay. You guys can read more about that on your own. What about Bethel?

Prayer? Some musicians want to come up. We'll begin to wrap this up. I know I'm meddling about the Sunday morning thing. And it's hard.

It's... I mean, this morning's breaking of bread was really good. There were some really nice things said and shared. And we participated in that. And it kind of...

And then the songs... The things we discussed at Sunday school time tied in. And then some of the songs we sang here tied in. That happens a lot. But you've got to be prepared.

You've got to participate. You've got to be present. It's like 45 minutes. If I told you all you could do is...

[28:45] You've got 45 minutes this week? I know. I'm meddling. You've got 45 minutes. You can come Sunday morning.

Work your week around it. I think you'd benefit from it. I'd benefit from you coming. Because you would say something to me that would impact my life. That's what it's about. It's fellowship.

It's communion. It's the church body. We're one in Christ. We're unique. Separated from the world. It's the only time you're going to have it.

All week. Prayer. Fourth spoke of the wheel. I think at Bethel we've been talking about prayer a lot.

Since August probably. I said that kind of... Since August? I didn't mean it that way. I believe... KJ, have you put those videos on YouTube?

[29:42] On our Bethel YouTube channel? I thought Scott DeGross was on there when I looked it up the other day. Does anybody go to our YouTube channel? Who's looked at our YouTube channel? Who's listened to the messages from Pinecrest?

You know what? The music in there. My son and those guys did it. It was really good. The music in there that Nathaniel recorded was really good. You talk about a church working together.

You know these young guys? Nathaniel Eck and my son Luke and Jacob and Luke's wife. And Nathaniel's fiance now. Brought all the equipment in themselves.

And they sang down there at Pinecrest. And if you listen to the songs on YouTube, they're really good. What they recorded was really good. Prayer. We do it next Sunday.

We set aside one Sunday a month for prayer at our Sunday school time. I found great comfort in Scott DeGross's message on prayer when he said, you just can call out to God anytime.

[30:44] It doesn't have to be long, drawn out prayer. Just don't hang up the phone. Stay connected. What a challenge. Just stay connected in prayer to the Lord.

The other day at work, I was doing something tedious on an RV. And I go, oh, God help me. It was loud enough where the owner heard me and peeked around the corner. He goes, everything all right?

I go, yeah, just praying to God that I could do this. And what's the alternative? I'm going to curse? Yeah. Does that happen too?

Bob. I'm so ashamed. You know, whatever your job is, manual labor or mental labor, right? You go there, don't you? You can curse or you can ask God for help.

Prayer. It's simple. Here we go. Last verse and then we'll sing our last song. Acts 2, 46 to 47. Here it is.

[31:58] Open your Bibles. Acts 2, 46 to 47. Read along with me. There is so much further advance than we ever be. The New Testament believers were so devoted.

Listen to this. This is in Jerusalem, but you'll see it all the places and you read through Acts. Day by day, attending the temple together, breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

You know what happened in Jerusalem? There's so many people that they had to supplement.

Some people stayed after Acts 2. In town, there were foreigners. Stayed.

So they had to provide meals for these people. So they went house, I was breaking bread. There were donations to... That's why they were selling their property. It was feed the people that stayed. How many people got saved in one day?

5,000 men? Now that's 20,000 if you count women and children potentially. So there's a lot of things going on, you know, that you can go on and on about that.

[33:06] And what happens when there's this unique, specific, zealous fellowship going on, taking care of each other? The Lord added to their number day by day those who are being saved.

When the world really sees you living a Christian life, fellowship, like the daycare people, He will increase, I believe. He will increase His flock.

Let's end with a prayer, I mean a song. Thank you, I hope you get something out of it. I hope Acts chapter 2 is what we study next week. Ted has that message.

Thank you.