

## What To Do While You're Waiting On God: Acts 1.1-14

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[slide 1, blank] We're all very familiar with movie sequels whether it's Star Wars or Star Trek, The Hobbit or The Lord of the Rings.

Well, the book we're looking at today is a sequel, a book which continues a captivating story. In fact, its opening lines even suggests a title: [slide 2] The Continuing Story of Jesus.

That may seem like a strange title since Jesus himself only appears in the story during the first couple of paragraphs of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.

But Luke, whose 1<sup>st</sup> volume is the gospel which bears his name, is telling us in the opening sentences of his 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, Acts, what the book is all about.

It's all about what Jesus is continuing to do and to teach through his followers as they are filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

[slide 3, blank] Please open your Bibles to Ac.1. [pray, "HS speak to me" / read Ac. 1.1-14].

So a couple of preliminary issues to deal with before we begin.

[slide 4] 1<sup>st</sup>, Luke begins his 2<sup>nd</sup> volume by addressing a man named Theophilus. Who was Theophilus?

We don't know who he was. According to Tom Wright and others, it could be a made-up name. It means "Lover of God." If that's the case, then Luke would be writing to anyone who loves God and wants to know what God has done in Jesus and what God is continuing to do in Jesus.

It's also possible Theophilus was a real person. If we go back to his gospel, Luke addresses Theophilus as “most excellent.” That title was used for people of nobility in society.

As a person of noble rank, Theophilus would also be a person of wealth. It's assumed, therefore, that he sponsored Luke's writing project along with its publication – which would have cost about \$4,000 in today's currency.

For Luke to mention his name in both volumes, his gospel, and the book of Acts, gives credibility to his writings. It would be like a book today having Oprah's endorsement on it.

[slide 5] The 2<sup>nd</sup> preliminary issue is that in his sequel there are **3 key insights** Luke is eager for us to latch onto, in order to understand his book as a whole.

What then, is the 1<sup>st</sup> key insight to understanding Luke's 2<sup>nd</sup> volume? [slide 6] **The 1<sup>st</sup> key insight is the bodily resurrection of Jesus.**

In the last chapter of his 1<sup>st</sup> volume, his gospel, Luke describes scenes in which Jesus meets up with his followers after being raised bodily from the dead.

While it was really him, he was in a different kind of body, a transformed body; a body that could eat and drink, walk and talk,

but also, a body that could appear and disappear, a body that could come and go through walls and locked doors.

Here, in the beginning of his 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, Luke describes in v.3 how Jesus, after his suffering and death on the cross, showed himself to his followers giving many convincing proofs – many irrefutable, infallible, indisputable, proofs - that he was alive – he was no wraith or ghost!

Luke tells us in 1.3 that Jesus appeared to his disciples on many occasions over a period of 40 days.

The point Luke is making is that without the bodily resurrection of Jesus, there is no “Continuing Story of Jesus.”

Without his bodily resurrection there would only be the sad memory of a great, but failed teacher and would-be Messiah.

So that’s the 1<sup>st</sup> key insight to understanding Luke’s 2<sup>nd</sup> volume - the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> key insight to understanding Luke’s 2<sup>nd</sup> volume? **[slide 7] The 2<sup>nd</sup> key insight is Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God.**

This teaching on the kingdom of God frames the whole of the book of Acts. In 1.3, Luke tells us that “[Jesus] appeared to [his disciples] over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God.”

And at the end of the book, in 28.31, Luke tells us Paul, “Boldly, and without hindrance... preached the kingdom of God...”

Teaching about the kingdom of God thus frames the whole of the book of Acts.

So what is the kingdom of God? God’s kingdom has to do with God’s kingship, his saving rule and reign, which comes about through Jesus.

**[slide 8]** This kingdom is already here, having begun with Jesus’ first coming. But the kingdom is not yet here in all its fullness or completeness.

That will happen when Jesus comes again and establishes his kingdom rule and reign over all the earth.

On the day of his return heaven and earth will be joined together in a renewed creation where there will be no more death or mourning, or crying or pain.

In the interim, in the in-between times that we are living in now, we enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives as the “down payment,” Ephesians 1.14, of our future hope of life with Jesus in the new heaven and a new earth.

And it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us now to live as citizens of his kingdom who bear witness to his rule and reign over us by the words we say and the works we do.

So that’s the 2<sup>nd</sup> key insight to understanding Luke’s 2<sup>nd</sup> volume - Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God.

What then, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> key insight to understanding Luke’s 2<sup>nd</sup> volume. [**slide 9] The 3<sup>rd</sup> key insight is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.**

In v.2ff Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit was present when Jesus was teaching his followers about what is to come and

that they are about to discover the Holy Spirit as a new and powerful reality in their own lives.

In Luke’s 1<sup>st</sup> volume, his gospel, he points back to the time when John the Baptist summoned all Israel to repentance and renewal, baptizing with water.

John’s water baptism foreshadows Jesus greater baptism. As John himself says in Lk. 3.16, “He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be witnesses who share the good news about Jesus’ and his kingdom, even in the face of opposition, until he returns.

[slide 10, blank] But before all this is to take place, Jesus commands his followers to wait. They are to wait, v.4, for the gift of the Spirit promised by God his Father.

This is important instruction for us as well. [slide 11] There are times when we need to wait on God. We all know how difficult waiting can be.

I'll be standing in the express lane at Save-on Foods – the one that's for 1-12 items only - and there will be three people in front of me.

The line is moving very slowly so I start counting the number of items in the carts of the people in front of me. I start with the one closest to the till. This lady had **16** items run through.

Only when she is asked to pay does she open her purse, fumble through to find her wallet, and then pay - with cash – digging around for the exact amount of change. It drives me crazy! Waiting can be difficult.

You may be in a season of waiting in your life right now.

You may be anxiously waiting for the results of medical tests. You may be waiting for someone to change or for your circumstances to change.

You may be waiting to hear whether you got the job promotion or passed your exams.

You may be waiting for the Maple Leafs to win the Stanley Cup! Maybe this year is the year!

And we're all waiting for the lockdowns and mask wearing due to the coronavirus to be over and done with.

Waiting can be difficult. Yet waiting is what Jesus instructs his followers to do. "Wait for the gift my Father promised" says Jesus in v.4.

This morning there are 4 lessons we can learn from Acts 1 about what we can do while we're waiting on God.

**[slide 12] Lesson #1: While you wait, don't speculate.** Don't speculate about when God's kingdom will come in all its completeness or fullness.

Any parent traveling on a vacation with small kids has heard the question before. "Are we nearly there yet?"

Jesus faced a similar question from his followers relating to the coming of God's kingdom in v.6.

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" "Are we nearly there yet?"

Remember that throughout his public ministry Jesus went around preaching that the kingdom of God has come near; that it is among us.

And in v.3 he spoke to them, during the 40 days after his resurrection, about the kingdom of God.

So it was quite natural for them to ask "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" In other words, "Are we nearly there yet? Is this the time? Is it going to happen now?"

That's what they were hoping for. As foretold in the OT, when God establishes the kingdom of his Messiah, he will pour out his Spirit on all people – that was to be one of the major signs and blessings of his kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

The Spirit of God would make the rule and reign of God a living and present reality to his people. You can read about it in Psalm 72 and Isaiah 40.

So their question is not out of place. For if the Spirit was about to come, as he has said in v.5, the implication was that the kingdom was about to come too. It was as natural a question as a small child asking, "Are we nearly there yet?"

His answer to them, in v.7, was, “it is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

In terms of the small child in the car, he is telling them that they simply aren't going to know where they are on the calendar of God's unfolding purposes.

It seems pretty clear that the implications of all this for us are, that while we wait on God, we need not obsess with times and dates as to when his kingdom will come in all its fullness or completeness.

“It is not for you to know” says Jesus. So curb your inquisitiveness. Don't waste your time speculating about when the kingdom will come in all its completeness.

We can be like the theology student who was heard to say just before her final exams, “I don't know much about eschatology, but it's not the end of the world.”

What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson we can learn from Acts 1 about waiting on God?

[slide 13] **Lesson #2: While you wait, anticipate.** Anticipate the gift of the HS promised by God.

“Do not leave Jerusalem,” says Jesus in v.4, “but wait for the gift my Father promised.” When reading that verse, I thought of Carly Simons' song used for a Heinz ketchup commercial back in 1979 [slide 14, run video].

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.

As we wait on God we anticipate the gift promised by God; the gift of divine power – from the HS - for our God-given mission which is, according to Luke, to be witnesses for Jesus.

As his faithful witnesses we are promised power to proclaim his message.  
V.8: “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

We need that power, that strength, from God the HS, just as Jesus’ first followers did, if we are to be his witnesses and find ways of declaring to the world that Jesus is its rightful King.

One day his kingdom will come in all its fullness. Until then, we are commissioned by Jesus to be his witnesses; witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit.

How you witness will be different from how I witness or how someone else may witness for Jesus. We’re all gifted and wired differently by the same Spirit.

But know that it is the empowering presence of the Spirit in your life that will enable you to be a witness for Jesus.

And keep in mind that the Gk. word Luke uses for witness is *μάρτυρας*, from which we get our English word martyr. That tells us that being a witness for Jesus is not always going to be easy.

What then, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson we learn from Acts 1 about waiting on God?

**[slide 15] Lesson #3: While you wait, contemplate.** Contemplate the meaning of Jesus’ ascension to heaven.

V.9, “After Jesus said all this, and while they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him away and hid him from their sight.

And while they were gazing into the sky, as he was going, suddenly two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into the sky?”



This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him going into heaven.” Why contemplate the ascension of Jesus?

One of the key points about the ascension has to do with Roman Emperors.

When a Roman emperor died, it had become customary to declare that someone had seen his soul escaping from his body and ascending to heaven.

[slide 16] For example, if you stand under the Arch of Titus, located on the Via Sacra, just to the south-east of the Roman Forum in Italy, and look up, you’ll see a carving of the soul of Titus, who was Emperor from A.D. 79-81, ascending into heaven.

The eagle in the carving [show with laser pointer] is believed by the Romans to carry the soul of the emperor from earth to heaven; and from that time on he is worshipped with the other gods in the Roman pantheon.

The message of this was clear: the emperor was becoming a god, thus enabling his son to call himself a son of a god, which was a useful title if you wanted to rule the world in the 1<sup>st</sup> century!

[slide 17, blank] For Luke, there is a parallel here, but not an exact parallel, since he is clear that it was not Jesus’ soul that ascended into heaven, leaving his body behind somewhere, but his whole bodily self that ascended.

His ascension into heaven, then, tells us, that it is Jesus, and no one else, who is exalted and enthroned as the world’s true and rightful king, sharing the very throne and the very identity of the one true God.

As you wait, contemplate the fact that with his ascension, the resurrected Jesus is enthroned on high as the true and rightful King of the whole world.

The spread of his rule and reign is to take place through us and our witness, as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit,

knowing that one day he is returning and will establish his saving rule and reign over all the earth.

What then, is the 4<sup>th</sup> lesson we learn from Acts 1 about waiting on God?

[slide 18] **Lesson #4: While you wait, supplicate.** I'm using the word supplicate to keep all the verb endings the same. But it's another word for prayer; to pray earnestly.

Praying together is what the disciples' did in response all Jesus has just said to them. Look at vv.12-14.

"Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk [about 1 km] from the city [of Jerusalem].

When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying [that is, where they regularly met].

Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James, son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

They all joined together constantly [and earnestly] in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."

They all joined together constantly in prayer. Or as the KJV puts it, "They were all in one accord."

As I kid I always wondered, “How did 120 people fit in a Honda Accord! Maybe it was some kind of circus trick, like when all those clowns kept coming out a tiny car.”

They were all in one accord – they were all *joined together* constantly in prayer. They were unified in prayer. They were on the same page. [slide 19, blank] It helps to be on the same page with others, and not only in prayer.

For example, just over 20 years ago, NASA lost something very expensive. The Mars Climate Orbiter was a 340 kg robotic space probe launched December 11, 1998 to study the Martian climate, atmosphere and surface changes.

However, on September 23, 1999, communication with the spacecraft was lost after it went into orbit due to ground-based computer software which produced output in non-SI units of pound-seconds instead of SI metric units of newton-seconds as specified in the contract between NASA and Lockheed.

SI is abbreviated from the French: *Le Système international d'unités*, [day-uni-tay] and stands for International System of Units.

Because of that error, the spacecraft entered Martian atmosphere at a very low altitude which resulted in it disintegrating. And these are rocket scientists!

My point is, for people to be on the same page they've got to be talking the same language. And the language that unified these disciples of Jesus in Ac.1 was prayer.

As they're waiting for the promised gift of God and they're unified, joined together, in prayer.

Do you think they had any idea of the magnitude of what God was about to do among them; that thousands of people would come to faith in Jesus?

Do you think that this group of Jewish believers could envision that God would use them to cross racial, ethnic, and cultural divides and take the gospel to all nations, to all ethnicities and all languages?

I don't think they had any idea. I don't think they could even begin to imagine the incredible adventure God had in store for them.

How about us? Do we have any idea what incredible adventures God is preparing for us?

But that means instead of getting ahead of God, instead of trying to do it all ourselves, we need to wait on him.

While we wait on God, we needn't speculate about times and dates as to when God's kingdom will come in all its fullness.

While we wait on God, we can anticipate receiving power to effectively witness for Jesus. We'll talk more about that next week.

While we wait on God, we can contemplate the fact that the resurrected and ascended Jesus is the true and rightful King of the whole world and that the spread of his rule is to take place through us and our witness as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, knowing that one day he is returning to establish his kingly rule and reign over all the earth.

And while we wait on God, we can supplicate; we can join together and unite in prayer.

To get us started, we're going to take about 5 minutes to wait on God in prayer as the song, "Waiting here for you" is played on the screen.

If you know the song, sing along. If you don't, that O.K. The important thing is to be in prayer, asking God, as we wait on him, to pour out his Spirit afresh on our lives, to stir up the gift of his Spirit within us, that we might be empowered to be his witnesses [**slide 20, run video**].