

***Acts: The Next Chapter***

**PASSING THE BATON**

While most people admire Jesus, more and more have no time for the church. Even among Christians, there's a growing number saying, "Give me Jesus, but you can keep the church." These people agree that Jesus is the way, but they seldom find their way to church. They are convinced that Jesus is essential, but church is optional.

To be completely honest, there have been times when I've been tempted to think the same. I've wondered if there is an essential connection between Jesus and the church. Can I be a follower of Christ and not be an active part of the church?

Luke wrote both his Gospel and the book of Acts to a friendly skeptic named Theophilus. After reading Luke's Gospel, Theophilus might have been impressed with Jesus, but he had questions and misgivings about the church. In all likelihood, he wondered how this leaderless, powerless and persecuted movement could be the continuation of Jesus' ministry and the representation of God's kingdom in the world.

It was to answer these doubts and misgivings that Luke picked up his quill a second time and wrote the book we call the Acts of the Apostles. Acts is an *apologia* or a defense of the church, designed to convince Theophilus and anyone who reads it that the story of Jesus didn't end with his death or departure. Rather, it continues in and through the church.

If we want to be part of Jesus' story, we need to be part of the church's story. If we want Jesus to be part of our story, the church needs to be part of our story. That's the main message of

Acts, and starting with the first few verses every section and story in the book adds to that message.

## **ACTS 1:1-5**

A common idea among skeptics is that the church really wasn't Jesus' idea. Instead, it was an idea his first followers came up with after he was gone. They had had such a good time with him that they felt compelled to keep the good times rolling. So, they started the church. Theophilus may have had similar ideas.

With the opening verses of Acts, Luke put those ideas to flight by recalling a series of actions that Jesus took just before he left this earth. This series of actions proves to anyone willing to believe that Jesus fully intended his ministry and movement to keep going after he left. Through this series of actions, Jesus handed the baton of his ministry to his disciples. They were to be the continuation of his work and his presence in the world.

- **Jesus Picked and Prepared His Apostles – v. 2**
- **Jesus Presented Himself Alive to His Apostles – v. 3a**
- **Jesus Proclaimed the Kingdom of God to Them – v. 3b**
- **Jesus Promised Them the Holy Spirit – vv. 4-5**

Because of our place in history, our experience of these things is different, but when we become his followers Jesus hands the baton to us just like he handed it to his first followers. The question is not whether or not we have to be part of the church if we're followers of Christ. To be a follower of Christ is to be a part of the church. The important question is whether or not the world finds Jesus in us.