Questions for HGs on Acts 1vv1-11

**Getting going**

*Today we are starting a short series on the early chapters of the book of the Bible known as ‘Acts’ or ‘Acts of the Apostles’. It is the 2nd book of 2 written by Luke to a man called Theophilus. Look up Luke 1vv1-4 and see what Luke hopes that his 2 books will* ***do*** *for its readers, both Theophilus and us today….*

*Then turn on to Acts 1, and read vv 1-11*

***Into the text***

Luke wants our conviction, our confidence in Jesus to grow, and he focuses on 3 particular truths about Jesus in vv 1-3 and 9-11. Let’s look at them in turn:-

1. Why do you think Jesus continued to make numerous appearances to people in the 40 days after his resurrection (vv1-3)?
2. How secure is your belief in the resurrection? Why is this important for our faith?
3. Vv9-10 describes an event Christians call ‘The Ascension’. Look up Daniel 7vv13-14, which is fulfilled in Jesus’ Ascension. What insight does the Daniel passage give you as to the status and reign of Jesus now?
4. How much has the Ascension been an important part of your faith up till now? What are the implications of the fact that Jesus is reigning on high at the Father’s side in Heaven?
5. What does v11 teach us about what Jesus will one day do?
6. To what extent do you live each day in the light of v11? What can help us to embed this in our faith more?
7. What does Jesus command his apostles to do in v4? Why is it important they don’t start their public ministry until this gift is received? (see John 15v5)
8. Is Acts 1v8 another command or is it best seen as a prediction and a promise?

*Acts 1v8 is a bit like a ‘contents page’ of the whole of Acts, and indeed the following 2000 years. We are able to live now in the certainty that the good news of Jesus WILL extend to the very ends of the earth, as Isaiah 49v6 predicted about the rule of God’s chosen servant*

**Final thought…..**

*Luke wants us to be clear and certain about Jesus (risen, reigning and returning) and about the extension of his Kingdom to the ends of the earth. Actually of course these are linked, since it’s because of* ***who*** *Jesus is that his kingdom will certainly extend…*

* Praise him, renew your trust in him, pour out your concerns to the one who reigns, and cares…

**Acts 1vv1-11 sermon**

~ I wonder how many things you feel **absolutely certain** about?

Maybe the answer to the maths question ‘what 2 + 2 equals’.

Or how about a geography question ‘what is the capital of France?’. Most of us wouldn’t need to ‘phone a friend’ about that one!

But there are other questions that are more complex..

* what policy should our government adopt towards migration; or
* what would be a fair solution to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia?

There might well be a variety of different ‘legit’ answers to these ones..

Well the book of the Bible we’re going to study over the Summer will help us to become **certain** about the things that really matter, things that will help us navigate our way safely through life, and be ready for eternity.

So let’s dive straight into this book - Acts 1, on p1092, and see how it starts.

It says ‘In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jeus **began** to do and teach…’

That’s important because it reveals that this book, Acts, is the 2nd in a mini-series of 2 books written for the benefit, initially, of this man Theophilus.

In the first book, the author, Luke, tells us **WHY** he’s written this mini series…

Luke wrote to make us **certain**, **SURE** about Jesus – who he is, **what** he’s done for us, what he offers to us, what he requires from us…

In this first section of Acts, Luke wants us to be SURE about 2 particular things

First, he wants us to be certain about (1) The majesty and glory of Jesus

Jesus WAS **raised from the dead** (Image of Jesus who is alive again).

Hopefully, this has become clearer for us as we’ve devoted the last month to various occasions when the risen Jesus’ appeared to his disciples…

Now, Luke describes what Jesus did in the 40 days after his resurrection.

In this period he gave people (v3) many convincing proofs that he really was alive, appearing both to his inner band of followers but also on occasions to much larger groups, for example 500 people at the same time…

Jesus made all these appearances quite deliberately because he knew that it was crucial to establish that he had defeated death, and so could grant eternal life to all who would believe in his name...

So Jesus appeared time and time again, teaching his apostles about the Kingdom of God which he had established, and which they would soon be teaching to others….

‘*You can be 100% CERTAIN’* says Luke to us ‘*that Jesus rose from the dead*.’

And it’s important we are, or become certain of this central fact of Christianity, since it will steal death of its power to terrify us, and give us the boldness we need to follow Jesus in whatever paths he leads us.

~ I very much hope that we are becoming more and more certain of it…

Next up, Luke wants us to be certain that Jesus was ‘Taken up by God’ from them.

This comes in v9 which says ‘After Jesus had said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid them from their sight’

This is known as ‘The Ascension’, the moment when Jesus ascended back to be with God after his mission to planet earth.

The Ascension was predicted back in the OT, in the book of Daniel, where we see a Son of Man being brought into the very presence of God , and there receiving authority, glory and sovereign power from God.

That was fulfilled on the day God took his beloved Son back to Heaven (image of Ascension) and crowned him with the full glory that he had voluntarily laid aside when he came in humility to save sinners and reconcile us to God.

~ This week new paintings were unveiled of the King and Queen on their coronation day, a day when crowns were laid on their heads to display their power and glory.

Ascension day was a bit like that, but - of course- even greater, as Jesus was commissioned as the King of all Kings for all people, and for all of eternity.

~ I wonder whether you have thought much about Jesus’ ascension? You may well not have done since – sadly - the Church tends only to focus on it expressly on one day a year, and that’s a Thursday!

Luke wants to correct any blind spot we might have. He wants us to be certain that Jesus WAS taken up and crowned as King by God, and is now reigning on high…

~ Do you see Jesus as reigning on high?

* If you do, it will stop you relying on your own efforts, or putting your trust in others.
* It will make us trust in King Jesus more, and make us more eager to pray to him about everything, conscious that he alone has the power to act….

The last thing Luke wants us to be certain about Jesus is that he will return in glory.

This certainty comes from the words the angels say to the apostles after the Ascension

‘This same Jesus who has been taken from you into Heaven,

will come back in the same way you have seen him go into Heaven.’

Wow - that must have been ‘good news’ to these men, who knew how much they’d valued having Jesus with them. ‘He’s coming back’ – they were told, and this must have been a great comfort to them….

~ It should to US too, as we sometimes look at our world and see so much evil and pain, and long for the Lord’s return to clean up the mess, and bring justice to people

That WILL happen – Jesus will NOT remain on this throne in Heaven forever, he will come down one further time, to take his people to their home in Heaven, and to bring judgment on all those who rejected God’s rightful claim on their lives.

His return will be an awesome event- vividly interpreted in works like Michelangelo’s in the Sistine Chapel.(image of returning Jesus)…

This day will come, and it’s a day that we should all live in the light of, motivating us to live for Jesus now, eager to receive his commendation ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ on that Day.

~ Can I ask you how much the **return of Jesus Christ** affects the way you live at the moment?

Luke wants it to be something we believe, something that has a significant impact on the way we live, day by day…

Well, that’s what Luke wants us to be certain about Jesus..

* He WAS raised from the dead
* He WAS taken up to Heaven
* He WILL return in glory

May these convictions be increasingly ours, and may they make a significant difference to our lives…

The 2nd thing that Luke wants us to be CERTAIN about is (2) The inevitable spread of the gospel

If you look at vv4-8, you’ll see first a command, and then a promise to the apostles.

The command comes in v4, and is quite simple and clear….

They are **NOT** to leave Jerusalem, but rather they are to **wait** there for God to give them a gift, a special gift, one that they need if they are going to have any chance of being effective in Jesus’ service.

This gift is nothing less than a pouring into their lives of God’s Holy Spirit, a pouring that is SO intense that it is described as a baptism.

‘*Wait until you have received this precious gift’* Jesus says to them

After correcting a few of their misunderstandings, Jesus then says these words in v8,

‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you,

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria,

And to the ends of the earth…’

Now, many people seen these words as another command, like the earlier on in v4, something they are to obey. Jesus is ordering them to be Spirit empowered witnesses to him to the very ends of the earth…

These words have often been used over the centuries to bring the same challenge to Christians of each generation, indeed I’m sure I have done that myself….

But, let me share with you an insight that I heard this week that has totally transformed my understanding of these words, both for those original apostles, and for us today

Here it is ‘*These words are not an order, rather they are a prediction and a promise’*

What Jesus is doing is **NOT** acting like a bossy general ordering his troops to do what he says!!

**Rather** , he is encouraging them- that they WILL have all they need to be witnesses to Jesus, nothing less than the powerful Spirit of God will be poured upon them, and their witness WILL extend to the very ends of the earth.

What an **encouragement** these words would have been to this titchy little bunch of men, only 120 or so in number, that God was guaranteeing that their witness would spread out from Jerusalem, throughout the land of Israel, and beyond Israel everywhere. (Map of Israel with arrows going outwards)

If you look through the book of Acts, that’s **exactly** what we see, with Paul ending up preaching about Jesus boldly and without hindrance at Rome….

Reading about how this prediction and promise of Jesus was fulfilled is good for us, indeed one of the most famous preachers of the 20th century described reading Acts as being a ‘**tonic for our souls’**.

For as we hear about what God did through the apostles, **it encourages US** , that Jesus will **continue** to extend his Kingdom as we preach the gospel in the power of the Spirit, sharing with people that the Jesus who died for their sins, was raised from death, taken up to Heaven, and will return as Saviour and Judge.

This process has been happening over the last 2000 years, with something like a third of the globe now calling themselves Christians, and it **WILL** continue until that day when the door of opportunity closes when Jesus returns in glory.

We can be confident in the inevitable spread of the gospel, says Luke to us, since it rests on the work of Jesus on the Cross, the power of the Spirit of God, and the certainty that the promises of Jesus will come true.

~ What a great encouragement for us as the Funday and Alpha kick off next month, as we seek to take the gospel to the new and current residents of this area, as we seek to share the gospel with our family and friends

Luke says to us

‘Carry on boldly,

trusting in Jesus,

relying on his power and his promises’

[Prayer]