

ACTS ALIVE TODAY

Acts 1:1-11³

Heb. 1:1-2

INTRODUCTION: Did God abandon man at the gate of the Garden of Eden?

Did God leave Adam & Eve to stumble along the way through life without any divine help or fellowship?

Obviously not.

Did God leave man only to return at long intervals?

Not really. Although not recognized, he was always there. God is always in the midst of human affairs guiding, inspiring, and unfolding them.

We must not banish God from our own day by arbitrarily dividing history into ancient & divine as against modern & secular. God is present with us today just as he was present to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Samuel & Jeremiah.

We should not let this truth of the Divine Presence in current human history possess us.

Many people think the Bible is a dead book.

Some think God used to be active in the world but that he no longer is.

~~To them~~ The book of Acts opens with a statement that Jesus is still acting through his followers in the world just as he did when he was alive on earth and walking the dusty trails of Capernaum, Nazareth, and the Mount of Olives.

I am concerned in this message about people who today are asking "Where is God in the contemporary life of our time? Is he speaking to us through current events or contemporary people?" To them I would like to say, "Yes, God is still alive and active today just as he has been in the past. He is still speaking; and if we only listen, we can hear him."

I. "God, who in many & various ways spoke ^{long ago} of old to our fathers by the prophets, in these last days has spoken to us by his Son" - (Heb. 1:1-2)

God was revealing Himself & speaking & acting thru Jesus in his life, death, res. & ascension.

God is not silent; he does speak; He speaks to us; he speaks in distinct messages in voices awfully articulate.

Let us hear that voice of the Son of God, for if we hear it not, we may hear no other; and they who hear it live.

OVER*

Does God have something to say to us today?

Yes, He does.

~~(See sermon notes on sermon by this title)~~

Today we have many different voices speaking to us and telling us different things. Voices from politics, radio, TV, mass communications, from every field of human learning, come to us daily. We might well ask, "Does God have something to say to us today?"

In the time of Jeremiah, his chief of state asked the same question, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jer. 37:17)

Once a missionary in Brazil stirred the curiosity of the native residents when he sat reading his mail. So far as they could see he was just looking at pieces of paper. He told them that it was his mail; from these pieces of paper he got his news. When they saw him reading his Bible he told them he was receiving news from God; and he started a new spractice among them. After that the people would approach him when they saw him reading the Bible and ask: "Any news today from the Great Father?"

From every continent the question is being asked, "Is there any news from the Great Father?"

"Is there any word from the Lord?"

In Jeremiah's time the people, for the most part, had brought punishment on themselves, for they would not listen to the words of the Lord.

If there is no word from the Lord for us today, or if we will not listen to it, then we're in for the Dark Ages that will make the Medieval Age look like a splendid Golden Age of Utopia by comparison.

Our generation must be reminded that there IS a word from the Lord. He DOES have something to say to us today. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Martin Luther prayed fervently:

"Oh, my God, punish us ~~for~~ rather with pestilence,
with all the terrible sicknesses on earth,
(~~with war,~~) with ANYTHING rather than
that thou be silent to us!"

Such silence never means that God does not speak,
but that we will not hear.

To those who will not listen, God does not speak.
Then the whole universe becomes a gulf of silence,
a void of blackness.

They suffer, and there is no God;

They sin, and there is no Redeemer.

They despair, and there is no Comforter.

God forgotten is God ignored;

God ignored is God doubted of;

God doubted of is God denied;

and God denied is sooner or later God detested.

A. (Exegesis) What truth is found in this scripture?

1. All that Jesus began to do & teach

a. The acts (doings/works) of Jesus

b. The teachings of Jesus.

2. The place of the apostles whom he had chosen

a. He worked thru MEN.

b. He worked especially thru CHOSEN men.

~~3. Certain supernatural elements involved~~
~~(the resurrection)~~

4. Yet God worked thru certain specific, actual,
contemporary events.

a. The event of the historical appearance of Jesus

b. The event of the death & res.

c. The events were verified by many proofs

(1). Does no violence to logical reasoning

(2). We are not required to be so gullible as
to accept testimony without evidence.

5. He acted in a practical way for them,

charging them to do something specific:

(Do not depart from J'lem but wait for the
promise of the Father)

B. EXPOSITION - "(What is the MEANING of these truths?)

1. The acts and teachings of Jesus himself as found in the four gospels were carried on and continued in the apostolic period

a. Described in the book of Acts

b. The H.S. working thru the apostles.

c. There is an implication in the word "began" that the book of Acts will be an account of the things Jesus CONTINUED to do & teach after his ascension - by his Spirit in his followers.

The subject of the Acts is the same as that of the Gospel - the words & deeds of Jesus.

The Gospel was only the beginning.

The word "began" teaches us that the work of the church is still the work of the Lord,

although he has now been taken up into heaven.

His sojourn on earth was only a BEGINNING of a work which was destined to continue.

2. God has always worked thru MEN, rather than thru programs or machines.

In this connection it is good to remember that Jesus preached much about the Kingdom of God. What did he mean by this?

- The decisive intervention in history of God Himself to visit and redeem his people. (Past, Present, Future)

There is a double petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.."

We might assume that the second petition explains and amplifies the first.

Definition: the K. of God is a society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven.

~~3. Faith always requires men to face up to the supernatural; God does not make it too easy for us to believe.~~

4. God always spoke to the Biblical writers in specific ways. - *after three current events*

a. Illustration of Ahaz when the king of Syria and the king of Israel came to fight against J'lem and God promised their defeat and challenged Ahaz to ask Him for a sign. (Isa. 7:1-16)

B. EXPOSITION - "What is the MEANING of these truths?"
1. The acts and teachings of Jesus himself as found
in the four gospels were carried on and continued
in the apostolic period
C. 2. b.

- * "Do not pray for easy lives.
- Pray to be stronger men.
- Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers.
- Pray for powers equal to your tasks."
- Phillips Brooks, (quoted by Pres. Kennedy
at Presidential Prayer Breakfast, 7 Feb '63)

of the Gospel - the words & deeds of Jesus.
The Gospel was only the beginning.
The word "begin" teaches us that the work of the
church is still the work of the Lord,
although he has now taken up into heaven.
His sojourn on earth was only a BEGINNING
of a work which was destined to continue.

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rather than through programs or machines.
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Jesus preached much about the Kingdom of God.
What did he mean by this?

- The decisive intervention in history of God
himself to visit and redeem his people.
There is a double question in the Lord's Prayer,
"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done."

We might assume that the second petition explains
and amplifies the first.
But notice: the Lord God is a sovereign upon
earth where God's will is as perfectly done
as it is in heaven.

3. Faith always requires man to face up to his
responsibility; God does not make it too easy
for us to believe.

A. God always spoke to the Biblical writers in
specific ways.
Illustration of Adam when the King of Syria and
the King of Israel came to fight against him
and God promised their defeat and challenged
Adam to ask Him for signs. (Isa. 45:1-6)

They heard God's message thru specific historical events.

5. God's action requires some specific re-action on man's part.

(Ill. of Abraham, Moses, Saul of Tarsus)

C. APPLICATION (What Does this have to do with us?)

1. The Bible is just a BEGINNING

a. Not just a dead old book

b. The story is continued in today's newspaper

c. We are writing the 29th chapter of Acts.

Look at

"unhindered"

2. The place of God's present day apostles is to be ready and available for God to use today, as He sees fit.

a. We must ask, "How can we best relate our lives to the work God is doing today?" *

b. How does God use persons as channels of his work in today's world? (See quote by Phillips - In your ordinary vocation. Brooks) **

~~3. We must be prepared to discover the supernatural element even today if the book of Acts is to be a continuing story. (XXXXXXXXXX)~~

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

~~a. The "supreme acquiescence" of the human mind.~~

~~b. Man is not supreme; nature is not supreme.~~

4. A challenging task for Christians today is to try to discover where & how God is working thru the events of today's world.

Is God trying to tell us something or do something today thru (the Viet Nam war, the riots in Detroit and Newark, the break-thru in space exploration, the United Nations, the ecumenical movement, & theological exploration in religion?)

Biotechnology

5. Christians must always guard against the danger of generalizing their obligations rather than hearing specifically what God is saying and rather than doing exactly the thing God wants them to do.

a. We need the H.S. to interpret God's activities for us today.

b. We must make no mistake about it;

the Xtn faith demands something of us.

(over)

They heard God's message thru spiritual malnutrition.
~~A few days ago~~ (Nov '74) A mother was charged with child abuse as she sat in a closed van along a southern New Mexico Highway without seeking help while death and malnutrition stalked her family. The local sheriff said the woman was charged. (11) "because food was available. There was an orchard across the road, and they sat there suffering from malnutrition."

How many parents sit and do nothing while they and their children are stalked by spiritual malnutrition and spiritual death! And in almost every case help is near at hand. Other Christians are within the next block, churches are not far away, the gospel is on the radio which they own if only they would tune it in and listen, Bibles are easily available at all bookstores. Yet they just sit there and suffer from spiritual malnutrition and death, and they let their children be deprived of religious education and training, and they grow up without God as practical pagans and athiests, with a character weak and stunted and sick because they did not have the benefit of a Christian home and influence.

It is the responsibility of all parents to take the meat and drink of the gospel for themselves and to offer it to their children and encourage them to get the nourishment and sustenance that is needed and available to them for spiritual wholeness. Parents who neglect this out of callous indifference are just as guilty as the poor woman along the New Mexico highway!

Christians must always guard against the danger of generalizing their obligations rather than hearing specifically what God is saying and rather than going exactly the thing God wants them to do. We need the B.S. to interpret God's activities for us today.

We must make no mistake about it: the faith demands 2-something of us.

But I want to leave with us

CONCLUSION: The ~~implication~~ is that God is still alive and speaking and acting through people and events of (19th) just as much as in AD 30 or A.D. 60. God is not dead; we are dead spiritually to perceive the living God.

God has not ceased his acting on the stage of world history with the close of the book of Acts or of the N.T.

If only we had eyes to see, he is still carrying out his redemptive acts today.

(~~The Lord who intervened in Nineveh can intervene in Newark.~~)

The Lamb of God who was victorious over the tyranny of Rome can be victorious today over the tyranny of any new anti-christian totalitarianism, and materialism, + secularism.

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON:

O Lord God, who didst begin thy redemptive work through Jesus our Savior, and who hast continued it through thy servants down through the centuries,

grant that we here today may be open channels of communication to our own generation as the Holy Spirit continues to act through ~~even us,~~

(Unworthy as we are.)

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Fr. Carson, Ch. #344, 6 Aug 67
Bangkok, Nov. 74

Bardmoor B.C. Nov. 22, '81
Ab. Dunedin B.C. 9-17-'86