

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

OCTOBER 2018

## WRITING THE TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER OF ACTS

The introductory words of Luke in Acts 1:1, 2: “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day he was taken up, after he had by the holy spirit given orders to the apostles whom he had chosen.” If the things recorded in the gospels were what Jesus *began* to do and teach, then the the book of Acts must be a record of what he continues to do and teach. The difference is that he is now doing it through his people instead of his being present with them physically. Now instead of “doing and teaching” in his physical body he will be doing it through his spiritual body, the church. In Luke 12:49, 50 Jesus states “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with and how distressed I am until it be accomplished.” The Greek word here translated “distressed” is *sunexomai* meaning “pressed” “constrained” or “kept back.” He is saying he cannot do his mightiest work until after this baptism he has mentioned. So, what was his mightiest work? He said, “I came to cast fire upon the earth.” But he cannot cast it yet. He must undergo a baptism of suffering on the cross. It is only after the cross, the resurrection, ascension and appearance before the throne of God in the holy place (Heb. 9:12) that he can fulfill his mission. Now in the book of Acts his baptism is over. His earthly work is accomplished and now he is not constrained. What he could not do in his physical body because of geographical limitations, now he can do in his spiritual body. In the book of Acts we see him casting fire upon the earth.

His work is being continued in the book of Acts. This book ends with these words: “And he (Paul) stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (28:30, 31). But this is not all that Jesus continued to do and teach. Paul and the other apostles continued preaching and teaching for many years. Therefore, the twenty-eighth chapter of Acts is not the end, the twenty-ninth chapter was and is being written by his people, the church. Our question today is: How does the twenty-ninth chapter, part of which we are writing, compare with the first twenty-eight chapters?

The first and most important comparison we could make is how do the two chapters compare in what they believe about the nature of Jesus Christ. We will first state the belief recorded in the twenty-ninth chapter. This belief is summarized by two prominent clergymen in America today. Both present Jesus as a “Godman,” not as a perfect human man without sin. The first, J.I. Packer, professor of historical and systematic theology at Regent College, wrote in his book *Knowing God*: “The babe born at Bethlehem was God and man. The mystery of the trinity is unfathomable. We cannot explain it; we can only formulate it. Perhaps it has never been formulated better than the words of the Athanasian Creed. ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, is God and man...perfect God and perfect man...who although he be God and man; yet he is not two but one.’ Our minds cannot get beyond this. What we see in the manger is God made man.” Second, we quote a popular Trinitarian, Max Lucado, named

“America’s Pastor” by *Christianity Today* and “The best preacher in America” by *Reader’s Digest*, who wrote in *It Began in a Manger*: “He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon a young girl. God as a fetus, Holiness sleeping in the womb. The creator of life being created. God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys, and a spleen. He stretched against the walls and floated in the amniotic fluids of his mother. Angels watched as Mary changed God’s diaper. The universe watched in wonder as the Almighty learned to walk. Mary may have felt awkward teaching God how he created the world, and when she prayed to the God sleeping under her roof, she may have accidentally called her son ‘Father.’ She asked, ‘Did you have a good journey down?’ Jesus may have had pimples. Perhaps a girl down the street had a crush on him or vice versa...One thing for sure: he was, while completely divine, completely human.” We wonder how this renowned preacher found any of this in Scripture. If his words sound silly and asinine, just think, this is the doctrine of the Trinity affirming Christ was not a man.

The beginning of the twenty-ninth chapter of Acts introduces us to the years following the death of the Apostles. Here we see the Church Fathers, the so called “ruling Bishops” of the church, under the auspices of Emperor Constantine, a worshipper of the sun god, purported to have been converted to Christianity, inaugurate the church councils which successfully married Greek philosophy with Christianity. It was these councils, especially the Council of Nicaea (325) and the Council of Constantinople I (381), that has influenced the church from then to the present day. It was the Council of Nicaea that birthed the doctrine of the trinity establishing Jesus as God the Son, and the council of Constantinople I that added the Holy Spirit as the third person of the trinity. Thus, the doctrine of the trinity originated in the twenty-ninth chapter of Acts, not in the twenty-eighth chapter. H. G. Wells in *The Out-line of History* wrote: “It is very manifest that much of the history of Christianity at this time the spirit of Constantine the Great is as evident as, or more evident than, the spirit of Jesus.”

Now to compare how the nature of Christ as presented in the first twenty-eight chapters with what we have seen in the twenty-ninth chapter. When we refer to twenty-eight chapters of the book of Acts we are referencing the whole of the New Testament as it is lived out in the lives of the Apostles as they fulfilled their mission given by Christ at his ascension. We begin with the first Apostolic preaching after the ascension, that is the sermon by Peter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:14-36. After quoting from the second chapter of Joel and explaining the events taking place that day. Peter continues: “Men of Israel, listen to these words; Jesus the Nazarene, a *Man* attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death. But God raise him from the dead.” (verses 21-23). Peter is emphasizing that Jesus was a man and it was God

performing signs and wonders through him. Trinitarians would say that “God performed these signs and wonders through God.”

The Apostle Paul’s words correspond with Peter when he affirms the fact that Jesus is a man when he announced to the Athenian philosophers that God “has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by a *Man* whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Paul further states: “The first man Adam became a living soul the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second *Man* is from heaven. (I Cor. 15:45, 47).

Then Peter quotes the vitally important words with reference to God and Christ based upon Psalm 110. “Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘the Lord says to my lord, sit on My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool of your feet.’ Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ...this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:33-36). No Jew would have ever believed that God would have made God both Lord and Christ. Does it make sense that God would have allowed God to be crucified and then God raised God and sat him on His right hand? The twenty-eighth chapter of Acts does not present us with a half-God and half-human Christ.

The next comparison we will make between the two chapters of Acts can best be seen in what was and is being preached. The message of the Book of Acts is two-fold: the kingdom of God and the resurrection, two subjects that we hear little about in today’s preaching. The gospel of the kingdom is virtually an unknown topic in churches today and the resurrection is preached, for the most part, only on Easter Sunday. In modern preaching where much of the Scriptures are actually denied or neglected, psychological theories, various social sciences and marketing techniques from the business world are developed as guides and models for the church, there is no room for sermons on the preaching of the kingdom or the resurrection. Dallas Willard in his book *The Divine Conspiracy* stated the problem very well in these words: “Gospels of sin management presume a Christ with no serious work other than redeeming mankind, and Christians, for the most part, consider the primary function of Christianity to be admitted to heaven. On the right they foster ‘vampire Christians,’ who only want a little blood for their sins, but nothing to do with Jesus until heaven, when they have to associate with him. On the left they foster the Phariseism of a more more less brutal social self-righteousness.”

The ministry of Christ was characterized by his preaching. At the beginning of his ministry “Jesus began to preach and say, ‘repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” and “Jesus was going about in all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:17, 23). As we saw in Acts 1:1 this what Jesus “began both to do and teach.” So, the message of the first chapters of Acts is what he continues to “do and teach.” It was Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts that set the stage for the gospel to be taken into all the world. The message of the first twenty-eighth chapter of Acts was the good news of the kingdom of God. Here on the day of Pentecost Peter stated that “God had sworn with an oath to seat one of his (David’s) descendants upon his throne” (2:30). This is the beginning of the message of the

kingdom seen throughout the book. Philip went to Samaria and “preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12). Paul in Ephesus persuaded them “about the kingdom of God” (19:8), and in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders he reminded them that while he was with them he “went about preaching the kingdom” (20:25). The last chapter of the book concerning the Jews in Rome it states: “When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them and solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, both from the law and the prophets” (28:23). Further: “And he stayed two full years in his own quarters, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31). These passages affirm that preaching Christ and preaching the kingdom is essentially the same thing. Something never preached in our churches today.

Another neglected theme in today’s churches is the resurrection. Perhaps the reason for this neglect is our denial of death as an enemy. In the secular world the death of the unborn (abortion) and death of the aged (euthanasia) is using death as a friendly way to solve our social problems. In the church death has become a door to a better life and is therefore glorified in song and sermon, especially funeral sermons, and has given so much attention and exhortation about death and dying that they have ignored life and living, living in the power of the resurrection.

The book of Acts is a message of the resurrection. N. T Wright in his outstanding book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* states: “Acts offers a rich variety of material on the resurrection. There is never any question what the author believes about the final destiny of God’s people. There will be a great day of judgment, at which Jesus, having himself been raised from the dead, will be the judge. At that time all who believe in Jesus will be vindicated.” This is shown to be true in Acts 10:39-43: “The Jews in Jerusalem put him to death by hanging him on a cross. God raised him up on the third day and granted that he become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead. And he ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. Of him all the prophets bear witness that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Again, the book of Acts is a message of the resurrection., sadly this is not the message we are hearing in the average church today. The twenty-ninth chapter of Acts is the record of the maneuver to marry the gospel with Psychology. Harry Emerson Fosdick became the leading proponent of unlimited human potential which has been translated into theology by such lights as Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller and Joel Osteen. Thus, in many pulpits, theology has become therapy and faith and God’s word has been shelved and the resurrection forgotten. Even in many so called “Bible believing churches” the message of going to heaven when we die has supplanted the message of the resurrection. The twenty-ninth chapter of Acts, by neglecting the Scriptural teaching on the resurrection, has looked upon our future life as being a life of a “bodiless spirit.” Our emphasis in salvation has been upon the “soul” and has denied the concept of bodily salvation to be experienced in our resurrection, which is guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ. To the apostle Paul “the redemption of our body” is the hoped-for salvation proclaimed in Acts twenty-eight, and in terms of this hope we are saved (Phil. 3:8-11). This hope is based on the resurrection.