

ACTS

CATCHING UP WITH THE SPIRIT



MATTHEW L. SKINNER

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Chapter 1

What God Has Done

Passages to explore

- » Acts 1:3-11 Jesus' final words and promises to his followers
- » Acts 2:1-36 Peter's speech in Jerusalem during Pentecost
- » Acts 3:11-26 Peter's speech in Solomon's Portico in Jerusalem
- » Acts 13:13-43 Paul's speech in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch
- » Acts 17:16-34 Paul's speech to the Areopagus in Athens

Whenever a new *Star Wars* movie comes out or I get ready to start watching the next season in a television show I like, I always go online to read synopses of what happened in the previous installment. In film sequels and shows, the story often picks up right where it left off, but I've had

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months if not a full year to get distracted by other things. I forgot what I used to know about who's a Jedi, which of the kids from Hawkins might still be possessed by the Mind Flayer, and whether Piper and Alex were officially a couple the last time I saw them. What crisis needs to be resolved? What's supposed to happen next? What did I learn from the story so far?

When we start reading our way through Acts, we need to be aware that it begins with unresolved confusion, excitement, and expectation hanging in the air. We might say the story, as a continuation of Luke's Gospel, assumes its readers are still up to speed with everything. Jesus is still with his friends, having been raised from the dead to their great surprise. He defeated death—a rather climactic aspect of the plot! Maybe we remember that throughout Luke he spoke about the arrival of the “kingdom of God.” If we reread the final verses in the Gospel we will notice that Jesus talks about “repentance and forgiveness of sins” for “all nations” and “power from on high” about to come to his disciples (Luke 24:46–49).

As Acts gets rolling, Jesus commissions his followers to perform a task: they will bear witness about him. They will have to communicate what God has shown them through all they experienced during their time with Jesus.

In other words, they are going to spread the Christian message. They are going to convey God's good news. We don't know if they're eager or frightened at the beginning of Acts, but certainly they're being called into action. They witnessed a stunning transformation—their friend who was executed by Roman officials was raised to new life—and so their lives have changed. After experiencing something like that, their whole conception of what's normal and what's possible must also be transforming. What are they going to

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tell people? What exactly has God done? What is this new Christian message, after all?

In this opening chapter we will explore several passages that sketch the contours of the Christian message, as Acts presents it to readers. The passages I'll set before us are mostly scenes in which a prominent member of the church offers a speech or sermon to an assembled crowd. We need to remember, however, that speeches are not the only way Acts communicates what the good news is and what changes it sets in motion.

The thirteenth-century friar Saint Francis of Assisi said, "It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching." (He's popularly quoted as having declared, "Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words," but that saying never appears in his writings.) Francis urged his followers to pursue consistency in how they lived and what they said. Acts is reaching for something similar, I think, because it is a story about the communities that believers form together and the deeds believers perform on behalf of their neighbors, just as much as it is a story about the message believers speak aloud to others. Passages we will explore in future chapters in this book will help us appreciate this even more.

If you belong to a church that recites creeds in worship, such as the Apostles' or the Nicene Creed, or that subscribes to certain "confessions of faith" (my church does both), you might assume that the topic "what God has done" has to involve a long list or explain complicated theological topics. That's not true for Acts. For the most part, Acts is interested in making one basic point about God's activity: God has made Jesus the source and guarantee of humanity's salvation.

As we will see shortly, Acts affirms that Jesus is the Christ, the one God sent to fulfill God's promises to the

people of Israel and the whole world. Often Acts emphasizes Jesus' resurrection as a decisive moment in which his identity as Savior and Lord was vindicated by God. His resurrection means more than a reversal of fortune or a second chance at life; it is

the declaration that God wields power over death itself. No form of captivity to anything like death, ignorance, illness, or satanic influence can withstand the liberating power of God. Jesus' resurrection and ascension have declared that. Moreover, those events have accomplished that liberation, altering the makeup of all creation. For God has now installed Jesus Christ, the resurrected one, as judge over humanity and made him the reason why we are released from our sins' power and why people will be raised to new life after their own deaths.

Nowhere does anyone in Acts provide a detailed explanation of exactly *how* Jesus brings God's salvation into its fullness in all those ways, but repeatedly people in Acts insist *that* Jesus does so. Accordingly, many of the speeches in Acts draw attention to Jesus Christ's unique authority and the confident hope that humanity can expect resurrection from the dead. Different speeches will use different language and highlight different details because every speech has its own audience and its own circumstances that make the speech necessary in the first place. The speakers in Acts don't bear witness to Jews in exactly the same way as to Gentiles. Hostile audiences hear about the good

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news differently than friendly audiences do. All of that makes sense. There's a good reason why preachers' funeral sermons aren't exactly the same as the sermons they give during the annual stewardship drive.

What has God done? Acts can't fully answer that question. Or it won't fully answer it. Acts just gets us started toward crafting an answer by announcing with confidence that Jesus is the fulcrum for the fulfillment of God's gracious intentions for humanity. I find this very helpful, that Acts does not lead readers into precise descriptions and theological hair-splitting. That's not the purpose of the book. Rather, Acts urges us to see how the earliest believers took that core conviction, arising from their own experiences with Jesus, and trusted it. And they shared it. And they opened themselves up to discover more and more of its implications. Acts asserts that through Jesus God changed the world and revealed the future to come. In addition Acts believes that God continues to disclose the far-reaching consequences and implications of what God has done through Jesus Christ.

As Acts begins, the experiences Jesus' followers had with him in the past generate their capacity to live into a new future, if they keep up with the Holy Spirit. The church in Acts is on several journeys: people travel to new places, and they also come to discover the boundless richness of God's salvation. Acts implies that similar discoveries remain possible for Jesus' followers today.

Acts 1:3-11

Jesus' final words and promises to his followers

If Jesus had talked to communications and marketing consultants after the original Easter Sunday I suppose their

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first recommendation would have been: get new apostles. The apostles, along with his other followers, fell asleep on Jesus when they were supposed to be praying (Luke 22:39-46). One of them, Peter, repeatedly denied knowing him (Luke 22:54-62). When a number of women from the larger group told them they found Jesus' corpse missing from his tomb and met two angels with a message of resurrection, they scoffed (Luke 24:1-11). Those women remind us that not everyone who had been with Jesus had such a bad track record in the reliability department, but the apostles did.

In Acts 1 the apostles might have come around a little bit since the ending of Luke, and at least they have confidence that Jesus' promises of a "kingdom" are still going to come to fruition in some way. But they're going to need help going forward. They've given no indication they can figure things out on their own. Fortunately they won't have to, because just a handful of verses into the story, Jesus renews the pledge that he will send the Holy Spirit (recalling Luke 3:16; 24:49). This Spirit, Acts will reveal over time, will empower their ability to speak and live out the good news.

"You will be my witnesses," Jesus says (Acts 1:8) before he disappears from their sight. It's not a request or even a command. It's a declaration.

In a parking garage a few years ago I witnessed someone smash her car into a parked pickup truck, pull into a nearby parking space, and run away. When I spoke to a police officer later, I told him what happened, but when he asked specific questions to gather additional details, like what the driver was wearing and whether she seemed under the influence, I found myself apologizing for not being able to offer him more. "That's OK," he said, "you can only tell me what you saw." That's what it means to be a witness, whether in a legal setting or when talking about religious faith:

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we can only describe what we've experienced.

Whenever Acts talks about being a witness, bearing witness, or testifying, it's saying about the same thing the officer told me. Jesus informs his followers they will publicly recount to others the things they know to be true. In some scenes they will do that with words; in other scenes they will declare the nature of the good news through worship, prayer, care and healing, sharing meals with others, extending fellowship, expressing compassion, and generously sharing resources. Christian "witness" is at the heart of believers' activity in Acts. It involves people naming, confirming, and embodying truths that have already been manifested to them in their lived experiences with Jesus Christ. The apostles and others are not expected to possess secret knowledge or specialized abilities. As Jesus' witnesses, they will talk about him and what they have received from him. As people empowered by the Holy Spirit, they will turn out to be much more reliable than they have been in the story so far.

Acts 2:1-36

Peter's speech in Jerusalem during Pentecost

Pentecost was originally (and still is) a Jewish festival. Scripture establishes it as a celebration of the wheat harvest (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:9-10). Because it is one of Judaism's three pilgrimage festivals, in the first century many Jews would travel to Jerusalem for the occasion. That helps explain why the Holy Spirit empowers believers to speak so many languages in the Pentecost story. The church begins its public witness in Acts with a message to people who hailed from a multitude of places—both Jews and "proselytes" (who are non-Jews who had converted to Judaism).

With hyperbole, Acts says that this Jewish crowd contains travelers and immigrants “from every nation under heaven.” The Greek word for “nation” is *ethnos*. Don’t equate it to modern ideas of a “nation-state” or “country.” The expression calls attention to the variety of people who composed the diverse membership of Judaism. This notion of *ethnos*, like the English word *ethnicity*, calls attention to the factors that figure in people’s understandings of their identities based on their familial, linguistic, genealogical, regional, and cultural particularities. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit directs Jesus’ followers to speak first to a representative sample of all Judaism, with its wide array of differences. From that diverse group the new community that will be called “the church” attracts thousands of new members all at once.

The broad assortment of people and languages makes an important statement before Peter even starts his speech: the good news will not ultimately belong to one kind of people or one core ethnicity. That sense of a community composed of multiple identities will grow clearer later in Acts, when non-Jews (Gentiles) unite with the church. Imagine how different it might be if the Holy Spirit had prompted Jesus’ followers to address the crowd only in Hebrew or Greek. Instead, all languages belong; no one gives up who they are in order to become integrated into a homogeneous church culture. Instead, variation is one of the church’s original characteristics. The church of Jesus Christ consists of a unity that gathers differences and distinctions into a common

The church of Jesus Christ consists of a unity that gathers differences and distinctions into a common home.

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home. That's a message many congregations I know need to hear.

Peter starts speaking because everyone is equally “amazed and perplexed.” His speech is difficult to follow, but in essence it accomplishes three things. First, Peter interprets the dramatic events of the day as nothing less than the arrival of God's Spirit. Drawing from Joel 2:28-32, Peter says the coming of the Holy Spirit signals the beginning of “the last days,” a new culminating chapter in God's history with the world. In this new era when salvation is available—very near at hand—Jesus' followers will “prophesy,” which means they announce the imminence of salvation as a gift from God. The Spirit behind that power to prophesy is God's presence within and among believers of all sexes, ages, and social classes.

Second, Peter identifies Jesus as the Christ (another word for the “Messiah” or the “Anointed One”) and the reason why salvation is fully available and why the Spirit of God has come. Peter explains that various Jewish scriptures bear witness to the resurrected Jesus as the Christ and the fulfillment of long-standing hopes. He appeals to sacred texts and their oblique references to someone being unharmed by death and someone ruling at God's right hand. The speech mentions God often, attributing everything about Jesus' ministry, resurrection, and enduring authority to God. For Peter, literally all facets of Jesus' life story are indications of God's involvement in that story and a demonstration of God's commitment to humanity. And now, because he has assumed his place of authority at God's right hand, the resurrected and exalted Christ has poured out the Holy Spirit.

I should pause and note that there's a lot of God-language in my previous paragraph. How are we supposed to keep God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit all straight, and

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shouldn't the notion of the Trinity help sort this out? Frankly, I'm not sure that appealing to the Trinity *ever* makes things *easier* to understand. But the point is a good one—isn't Peter tying himself up in a theological knot here? Yes and no. Acts was written long before anyone proposed a doctrine of “the Trinity,” and so Acts is not meticulous about differentiating among the three Divine Persons. But all of the God-language in Acts also shows us one reason why Christians eventually proposed the Trinity as a way of describing God and how we come to know God, since in this passage and elsewhere Acts mentions intertwined relationships among the actions of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The bottom line for Peter's Pentecost speech is this: it's all about God—from the old promises in ancient Israel's history, to the recent events involving Jesus of Nazareth, to the recently arrived Holy Spirit, and to all that the Spirit will make possible.

Third and finally, Peter entreats his audience to embrace what he has just told them so they too can experience freedom from sins and the presence of the Holy Spirit. He calls them to “repent”—to change their minds about Jesus—and to “be baptized.” There are no conditions that might hold them back. I imagine he spreads his arms wide when he states, “The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls” (Acts 2:39 ESV).

In other words, everything has changed. For everyone.

Acts 3:11-26

Peter's speech in Solomon's Portico in Jerusalem

Right on the heels of the first speech in Acts (at Pentecost), Acts describes the first healing performed by apostles

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(Acts 3:1-10). Calling on Jesus' power as he speaks of Jesus' "name," Peter helps a man who was never able to walk stand up and enter a portion of the Temple called Solomon's Portico. This demonstration of authority over a lifelong incapacitating condition attracts the attention of a flabbergasted crowd. So Peter bears witness about Jesus, naming him as the unseen source of the man's newfound wholeness and also attesting to the power of faith in him.

Jesus possesses this power that works through the apostles because of God. God raised "the Author of life" from the dead and "glorified" (that is, bestowed honored upon) him. The detailed references to the circumstances of Jesus' death are curious, because Peter addresses this crowd as if they are exactly the same ones who turned their backs on Jesus in the presence of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate in Luke 23:13-25. Peter isn't confused, though. He speaks as if responsibility for Jesus' execution extends widely, almost as if that culpability belongs to everyone associated with Jerusalem or if it is simply part of the human condition, from God's perspective. At the same time, forgiveness and refreshment extend widely, too, and so Peter invites everyone to get ready for the "universal restoration" (literally, in Greek: "the restoration of all people" or "the restoration of all things") that God is prepared to make a reality.

The point where Peter mentions "universal restoration" is one of the places where I wish Acts was a little longer. If only Peter's sermon included just a couple additional sentences to explain what he means by that expression. It does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament, so there are questions about what exactly Peter has in mind. At least he refers to the prophets, so presumably some of the Old Testament's prophetic writings' most grandiose hopes

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are in view here. Imagine the visions the prophets tried to convey. Visions of justice extended to those who continually suffer injustice. Visions of all people enjoying everlasting security. Visions of shalom, a situation of peace, health, and abundance established by God. Peter also mentions the offspring of Abraham who will provide blessing to all of the world's families (recalling Genesis 22:18; 26:4). That offspring is Jesus, and Peter's comment reiterates that the "universal restoration" will include more than Jews alone. The scope and scale of this good news is immense.

I occasionally have to remind students not to fault the Bible for failing to give precise descriptions of what the future will look like when God has finished constructing it. All language, metaphors, and images are bound to fall short. Maybe the point of the ambiguity is to call our imaginations into action. Some of the Bible's attempts to portray aspects of God's restorative work are pretty good fuel for Spirit-filled dreamers. Consider, for example, Isaiah 65:17-25, which speaks about considerably increased lifespans and wolves and lambs eating alongside one another with none of them looking over their shoulder. Directed by prophetic visions like those, let your imagination about the restoration God has promised run wild.

Acts 13:13-43

Paul's speech in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch

When Paul travels to the region of Pisidia and a nearby city called Antioch, which was an inland city in the western half of modern Turkey, he takes an opportunity to address a Jewish audience. It is the first of Paul's speeches that Acts records. He begins by swiftly summarizing the history of ancient Israel, from slavery in Egypt to the establishment of

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David's kingdom. He identifies Jesus as a Savior who came from King David's lineage, which is a statement about more than genealogy. It means Jesus revives hopes for a renewal of ancient Israel's glory days, especially in the sense of freedom from oppressors and a widespread reverence for God's holiness. (The New Testament consistently remembers David for his best qualities and accomplishments, not his worst.) Paul will also say, furthermore, that Jesus the Savior is greater than David, for unlike Israel's greatest king his corpse underwent no corruption.

To understand what God has done through Jesus, Paul says, his audience of fellow Jews needs to look back further into their history. The life, execution, and resurrection of Jesus demonstrate that God is keeping promises.

I prefer it when people make me specific promises instead of general ones. That way I know when they have or haven't kept them. "I'll repay you your \$50 on Thursday afternoon" is more helpful to me than "Don't worry, I'll take care of it." So exactly what promises does Paul have in mind in this speech? Although he is not especially specific about them, the overall context of the speech helps identify them. One is the promise of a Savior, someone who will lead God's people into the blessings God has in store for them. As we will see through the course of our exploration of Acts, salvation has many dimensions, including more than forgiveness of sins. Everything about salvation stems from the Savior. And Paul declares his Savior to be alive and active.

A second promise is liberation and security. Paul mentions the exodus from slavery in Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and the emergence of King David. All of those events from the Old Testament's greatest-hits album demonstrate God's commitment to keep the people descended from Abraham safe from harm and oppression. Deliverance from enemies

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and damage were prominent themes also in Jesus' ministry (Luke 1:72-75; 4:16-19; see also Acts 2:40; 26:18).

The last promise to notice stems from the other two: resurrection from the dead. When God raised Jesus it was more than merely an impressive display of divine power. Paul implies that resurrection itself is the keeping of a promise, the promise that God makes life after death possible. Jewish groups in the first century were divided over the issue of whether human beings should expect an afterlife, or whether what we have now is all there is. Paul argues that God definitively settled those debates by raising Jesus from the dead. Elsewhere he refers to Jesus as “the first to rise from the dead” and goes on to explain that his resurrection confirms God's promises in the Jewish holy books of the Law and the Prophets (Acts 26:22-23; see also 23:6-8). All of scripture's grand hopes for peace, security, wholeness, prosperity, and blessing will come to pass. With Jesus' resurrection God has declared that those who have died will not miss out on any of it.

Acts 17:16-34

Paul's speech to the Areopagus in Athens

Many years ago I rode an elevator with Christie Brinkley and Billy Joel. I'm not sure they were even aware I was there. He was humming a Beatles song and she just waited for the door to reopen. But for twenty seconds *I was there*.

Maybe you have a piece of rubble from the Berlin Wall or a beloved author once autographed a book for you. We like our mental and physical souvenirs of times we had contact with noteworthy people and places. Those memories give us ways to boast without being obnoxious about it.

In a similar way, the passage about Paul in Athens is a trophy story. “Look! Our guy was *there*—in Athens, the

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place that symbolizes the intellectual accomplishments of the ancient Greek-speaking world. Paul spoke, and the Athenians listened.” The sheer presence of this story in Acts celebrates the importance of the Christian message and Paul’s rhetorical skills. Even if Acts pokes fun at the Athenians as obsessed with exchanging ideas among themselves, still this scene marks a high point in the plot.

When the local intellectuals make it possible for Paul to present his teachings to the Areopagus, the council of the city’s governing authorities, he gives them a speech tailor-made for people familiar with certain Greek philosophical traditions. His audience is probably entirely Gentile, so he does not discuss Jewish scriptures. Rather, he speaks about humanity’s search for the Divine and about a shared conviction that deities are not contained within temples, statues, or altars. The God Paul proclaims is close by.

Nothing Paul says in his speech would have been terribly controversial to his Greek peers until he gets to the end and declares that this nearby God has made a clear statement to the world by raising a man from the dead. That claim about Jesus’ resurrection is too much for some in the audience; they ridicule him. Others want to hear more, and still others embrace the good news.

I don’t think anyone can *prove* that Jesus was raised from the dead. That piece of Christian faith depends not on the tools of science, history, philosophy, or militaries but on the witness of the entire church. That testimony began in the experiences of people like Mary Magdalene, Peter, and Paul, and it is reaffirmed in our own encounters with the resurrected Christ through sacraments, personal experiences, serving others, and the word of God that we encounter in congregational life and out in the world. The message of the resurrection rarely fits humanity’s ordinary ways of making

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sense of how the world works. That's true whether we are walking among intellectual giants or sitting with simpler folk who make their way through life with homespun wisdom.

Yet that is Paul's message for the Athenians: resurrection. As we know all too well, death is very good at its job. A huge leap of faith is required for a person to declare that death is not the end. Paul implies, moreover, that the idea of an afterlife is not something to debate as an abstract concept. His testimony, that God has spoken and given assurance to the world through the resurrection of Jesus, demands attention now, from all people. Paul insists that by resurrecting Jesus God has done more than merely reverse death. God has opened up a whole new future. God has promised to change us. God has vowed to judge the world so the result will be righteousness, which is a restored relationship between humanity and God—the Divine Being that humanity expends so much effort to find. According to Paul, God has said through Jesus, "I'm here!"

Reflections

As we continue to work through Acts I'll occasionally refer to "new things that God makes possible" or believers in Acts coming to recognize "new possibilities emerging" in their midst. The five passages we've just explored give some substance to what I mean with those expressions. Repeatedly people in Acts announce that God was active through Jesus Christ and that Jesus is the Savior who makes salvation a present reality. Everything else in the book builds on those foundational claims about God's accomplishments, including the arrival and power of the Holy Spirit to continue the good work. The entire narrative of Acts, through its stories about speeches, events, struggles, and discoveries, reaffirms the belief that God has acted and continues to act.

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As the speeches of Pentecost, Solomon's Portico, and Pisidian Antioch make clear, the salvation Acts talks about is not new in the sense of "never before imagined." The Christian message derives from older Jewish convictions and hopes. The God we meet through Jesus Christ is not unknown at all but is the God of Abraham and Sarah and the God of Miriam and Moses. The good news that Peter, Paul, and others proclaim is a declaration that God has fulfilled promises that we can read about in the Jewish scriptures, which Christians call the Old Testament. What's "new" for Christians is that we believe those promises came to pass through Jesus of Nazareth and that the Holy Spirit continues to connect those promises to us.

One of the most important and humbling discoveries in my own journey of faith has been my ongoing realization of how much damage Christians have historically done to our Jewish neighbors by assuming that faith in Jesus Christ involves a radical departure from Jewish understandings of who God is and what God intends for humanity. Too many Christians commit a grave error when they suppose that our religion was the first to discover grace, justice, peace, reconciliation, and mercy residing in the heart of God. Those ideas run through the Old Testament and they form the bedrock beneath the promises that Acts has in view. If we read Acts well, we will grasp that it tells a story of God's ongoing faithfulness to Jews and their hopes as well as a story of how that faithfulness comes also to benefit Gentiles.

Likewise, if we want to understand what kind of world this generous God has in mind and what divine faithfulness looks like in action, we need to follow the story's lead and commit ourselves to examining the Old Testament. In particular, we should notice what the Old Testament longs for and what it says about the transformations and restorations

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that God intends for human existence. When Peter speaks of a “universal restoration” accomplished because of Jesus Christ, those ancient scriptures will activate our creativity.

Biblical scholars sometimes find Luke and Acts frustrating because those writings have an occasional habit of referring to the Old Testament in broad brushstrokes instead of highlighting specific scriptural passages. The vague reference to times of “universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:21) is one example. Another appears in Luke 24:27 when the resurrected Jesus is with two of his followers and we read: “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (see also Acts 3:21, 24; 10:43; 13:27). But what I appreciate about that kind of unspecific writing is that it challenges me to think creatively. I don’t think every sentence of the Old Testament is about Jesus, strictly speaking. But I do want to take Luke and Acts seriously when they say something big and culminating has occurred through Jesus Christ. Apparently, then, none of the promises I find in scripture is too outlandish to believe. Maybe wolves and lambs will indeed one day settle their differences.

The most inscrutable thing God makes possible through Jesus Christ is resurrection from the dead. When Jesus’ followers have encounters with him, transformed, after his death, it changes everything for them. It makes them decide that all the great things they have hoped for as Jews in particular and as human beings in general are going to happen. Those encounters, of course, launch the Book of Acts and form the core of the church’s witness about a reliable and transformative God.

I’m always puzzled by Christians who think they can confess faith in the resurrection of the dead but then

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behave callously toward strangers and people in need. Anyone who thinks the hope of life after death minimizes the importance of this life and the imperative to go out of one's way to preserve the dignity of other human beings has distorted Christian faith into something monstrous. In Acts, confidence in bodily resurrection does more

than compel believers to speak and face their own deaths with courage; it also changes how they live and spurs them to care for others in self-sacrificial ways. That way of living comes across as anything but a burden. It is part of how the church experiences the joyful benefits of God's salvation right now. As a result, it is not optional for my congregation or your congregation to do the same. Generous care and hospitality constitute a necessary part of what it means to be "witnesses" of Christ and his resurrection.

As we go forward in our exploration of Acts we will discover that the church's witness does not remain static throughout the story. There is more to talk about than what happened in the past. Not only is believers' faith focused on what God has done through Jesus Christ, it also must repeatedly reckon with God's penchant for showing up in their midst. Members of the church in Acts discover new realities as they remain responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts, confidence in bodily resurrection does more than compel believers to speak and face their own deaths with courage; it also changes how they live and spurs them to care for others in self-sacrificial ways.

WALK MORE CLOSELY WITH GOD WITH THE BOLDNESS AND ZEAL OF THE APOSTLES.

Author and biblical scholar Matthew Skinner explores six key themes that illustrate the ways in which reading Acts is capable of igniting our imagination about the character of the Christian message, the work of God's people (the church), and the challenges of living faithfully in a complex and changing world.

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