

Acts 1:1-8 NIV
“How Jesus spent his last 40 days”

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

“³After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

“⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ⁷He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”

During the last two years, one subject has overshadowed all others.

Covid19 dominated medicine, education, sports, politics, the economy, family life, and churches.

We’ll not talk directly about Covid19 today.

Rather, we need to talk the topic: “the story behind the story” of Covid19.

You’ve likely thought about it.

Yet many people I know avoid the subject behind the subject; that includes ministers.

There’s a reason for the furor over remote learning, vaccines, masks, and cancellations.

A serious issue hides behind the rumpuses, ruckuses, and Covid19 commotion.

“Bob, I thought you’d introduce your *Book of Acts* series today,” you say.

We’re right on point with the *Book of Acts* because it deals with the “story behind the story.”

Acts emphasizes vital parts of that subject.

Let’s talk about the primary one.



The first autumn Norma and I worked with the Hollywood church, we went to the Los Angeles County Fair with a pediatric surgeon and his family.

As we returned to the doctor’s vehicle, we saw a growing crowd in the parking lot.

Word was, a young boy tried to jump from one of the parking lot trams to another and failed.

He evidently fell under the wheels of the second moving tram.

Our doctor friend proceeded into the crowd to see if he could render medical assistance.

Within moments, he came back to say that he could do nothing to help. The boy was dead.

The doctor thought it best we quickly leave the area so authorities could do their job.

I think the doctor mostly wanted to spare his and our children the shock of seeing the nasty trauma the boy suffered.

For their part, I suspect that investigating authorities wanted to know whether anyone witnessed the accident.

As in this incident, we talk of witnesses mostly in the context of crimes and accidents.

As usual, the Lord turns the ordinary upside down.

Jesus put a new perspective on witnesses.

The writer of Acts tells the exciting real story.

Even more important, Jesus revised the "story behind the story."

What do I mean: "the story behind the story"?

Covid19, the disease causing this present pernicious pandemic came on the world suddenly, mysteriously, and viciously.

Though not as deadly as the black plague and the 1918 flu epidemic, Covid19 represents a *death sentence* to many people.

Fifty years ago, many people equated the word *cancer* with death.



What's the story behind the story of Covid19, cancer, the Spanish Flu, etc.?

The NT Book of Hebrews identified the story behind the story of Covid19 and similar maladies:

"Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son (Jesus) also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and **only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. ¹⁵ **Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying**" (2:14,15 NLT).**

Diseases and disasters spawn death-fear-panic.

The Greek word for *fear* is the term from which we get the word *phobia*.

Since Adam and Eve, the human race has suffered death-phobia.

An old Jewish proverb reads;

"Be sure to send a lazy man for the angel of death."
Whenever the so-called "death angel" arrives for us or our loved ones, it's always too soon, isn't it?

Folks try to avoid the subject and use softer terms such as *passing* and *transition*; they run and hide from death and attempt deny it.

In Act III of her play "Sheppy," Amy Lawrence Lowell created a scene, where a fellow is in a Baghdad marketplace.



Let's reset Lowell's story in Sioux City a hundred years ago.

A man visits a Sioux City farmer's market.

He walks around a corner and meets the angel of death. Seeing death face to face terrifies the man. He jumps on a horse and heads for Okoboji whipping his steed all the way.

A conversation immediately ensues between the Lord and the angel of death.

The Lord asks Death, **"Why did you scare him so?"**

"I didn't mean to scare him,"

Death said,

"It astonished me to see him in Sioux City, because I had an appointment with him tonight in Okoboji."¹

How many panicky masked folks die from loneliness, the effects of over-eating, and hosts of unexpected accidents and maladies?

Recall what the Lord told Adam?

"You are dust and you will return to dust."

Genesis 3:19

No exceptions; every one descended from Adam and Eve has died or will die.

We might delay death with masks, vaccines, eating high fiber foods, going to the gym, and taking vitamins.

Some try to blunt their fear by keeping company with Jim Beam, Bud Lite, weed, drugs, and pounding drumbeat music.

Many live "lives as slaves to the fear of dying."

We can't avoid death.

It doesn't help to deny its reality.

Here's how Jesus resolved our situation:

- 1. First, on the cross, he paid the penalty for all the mistakes we make so we are forgiven.**
- 2. Second, Jesus came back from the dead.**
Check with your neighbors and friends.
Has anyone you know ever heard of anyone who returned from death?

The Apostles hadn't either. Returning from death was incomprehensible.

¹ Note to non-Iowans: Lake Okoboji is part of a popular lake recreational area about 80 miles northwest of Sioux City.

The Gospel writers Matthew and John were among Jesus’ earliest disciples.

Mark spent considerable time with Peter.

Luke checked the facts before he wrote his gospel.

Luke later wrote what most call *The Acts of the Apostles*, a sequel.

Luke began *Acts* by telling what Jesus did immediately after his resurrection:

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. **After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.**”

For nearly six weeks, Luke tells us, Jesus devoted his time to convincing the apostles of his resurrection.

The Sunday Jesus came back from the dead, two distraught disciples walked to Emmaus, a village west Jerusalem.

Jesus joined them and walked with them some distance; only when they sat down to eat with him did they recognize Jesus.

The two scooted back to Jerusalem to tell

The 11 apostles that Jesus was alive.

About that meeting, Luke wrote:

“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.³⁸ He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?’³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.⁴¹ And **while they still did not believe it** because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.”²



The apostle John wrote how difficult it was to really believe in Jesus’ resurrection.

One major factor was that it put the Apostles in trouble with Jewish authorities.

“That Sunday evening] the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them!”³

You’ve heard about Thomas, who doubted.⁴

John also said that Jesus performed many other signs that John didn’t have space to include.

² Luke 24:36-42 NIV

³ John 20:19, 20 NLT

⁴ John 20: 24-29.

For forty days, Jesus kept busy.

For one, he appeared to the Apostles giving those convincing proofs that he was alive.⁵

Why did Jesus spend so much time proving to the Apostles that God raised him from death?

First, because Jesus' resurrection is likely the most significant event in history--it's fundamental to God's rescue plan for mankind.

- **His dying on the cross covered the cost of our death sentence.**
- **In his resurrection Jesus defeated death, an act unequaled in human experience.**
- **On Judgment Day, he will raise all people. Here's what will happen:**
"A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."⁶

Scoffers have asked me, "Nearly eight billion folks live right now. Add to those all that have come before. How can God keep track of all the human activity for the millennia of history?"

It's a massive undertaking for sure.



Yet compare the challenge of judging 20 or 30 billion people with the creation of the Universe, which God did in the beginning.

The Milky Way Galaxy has billions of stars, many of them bigger than the sun that dwarfs our planet.

Billions of galaxies exist; God has named every star in every galaxy.

God could judge 20 billion earth people faster than you and I can add two and two.

He created life, which He exclusively can do.

In the Judgment, he will reconstitute every life and bring us from our graves.

Did you know that the Lord is preparing lake-front property, which some are earning?

You don't want it; it's a lake of fire and sulfur. "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."⁷

Now we come to the witnessing part.

Jesus defeated death; those who believe Jesus, live for him, and testify to his resurrection will live with him forever.

⁵ Luke carefully investigated the facts and then wrote what we call this letter to Theophilus, whose name means, "lover of God."

⁶ John 5:28, 29 NIV

⁷ Revelation 20:10 NASB

There’s a lot more to talk about, and God willing we shall do that in coming weeks.

Topics include:

What God’s kingdom is (another part of the story behind the story;

The Apostles’ boldness witness to Jesus’ resurrection;

How the Holy Spirit works within us;

What God expects of us—and more.

Here’s why we shouldn’t hide in fear or give up hoping:

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

“¹⁵ We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. ¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the

clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.”⁸

As you know, Paul, the one who wrote this letter, didn’t at first believe Jesus’ resurrection;

He fiercely tormented believers.

Three things changed Paul’s mind.

- **Disciples like Stephen lovingly testified.**
- **The Holy Spirit worked powerfully.**
- **Jesus appeared to Paul also.**

God bless you as you believe the greatest news ever—Jesus defeated our utmost enemy.

He will totally defeat Death—the story behind the story—when he returns for the Judgment.⁹

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⁸ | Thessalonians 4:13-18 NLT

⁹ | 1 Corinthians 15:25