

TO DO ... AND TO TEACH

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on August 27, 1961 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

The opening sentence of the book of Acts reads as follows: "The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up." (Acts 1:1-2). This is a very interesting sentence, and I would like to make it our text on this occasion. The "former treatise" is a reference to the gospel of Luke, since Luke is also the writer of the book of Acts. No more appropriate beginning for the book of Acts could be found than a reference back to the life of Christ. No better brief summary of Luke's gospel could be given than the things which "Jesus began to do and to teach."

The Gospel of Luke

Our minds immediately go back to the gospel, as Luke tells the story. The opening chapter is background. It tells about John the Baptist and about the angel Gabriel who came to announce to Mary that she would have a child. It has this wonderful passage, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:31-33).

In chapter two there is the story of the birth of Jesus. This is the most complete narrative we have concerning Christ's birth and the events that attended it. We also have in chapter two of the gospel of Luke the only material that we have at all in the New Testament concerning the boyhood of Jesus. It is in this chapter that we read of the visit when Jesus was twelve years old to Jerusalem. He was left at the temple answering questions of the learned doctors of the law and asking them questions when Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth. In the final verse of the second chapter of Luke we read, "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:52). And that is still the best formula there is in the world for the rearing of children. We must lead them to advance in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.

It is in chapter three of Luke that we read of the baptism of Jesus. Also, in verse twenty-three we read, "And Jesus himself, when he began to teach, was about thirty years of age." First, he did many things, then he began to teach. It is in chapter four that we read of the temptations and later, in verse sixteen of chapter four we read, "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down: and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears."

We have covered just four chapters and these we have covered only briefly, but already you can see how Luke is telling the things that Jesus did and then the things that Jesus taught. The rest of the book of Luke is an unfolding of these two themes: what Jesus did, and what Jesus said. Look at them for just a few moments.

The Things He Did

When you think of all the things Christ did they add up to a perfect pattern for us to follow. There is nothing in all of the narrative, whether by Luke or Matthew or Mark or John, that is embarrassing to those who followed later. There is no single time that Jesus ever went anywhere that he should not have gone; there is no single time he ever did anything that he should not have done. His life was characterized by a tremendous compassion for the poor and a love for all of those who were in need. His life was a life of service. From one end to the other he was doing something for other people who were in need. His life was characterized by the working of miracles to help those who were unfortunate. Many there were who were blind until he gave them sight. Many were deaf or dumb, or lame or lepers until he healed them. He even raised some from the dead, out of compassion for their loved ones.

His was a life of compassion for mankind, and so must ours be. We cannot raise the dead or heal the sick in a miraculous way, but we can attend to those who are sick, or poor, or hungry with tender care and with the necessities of life. In the normal, natural way we can at least do something of what Jesus did in his supernatural way.

Jesus' life was also characterized by obedience. It is in Luke 22 that we read of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night in which he was to be betrayed. There, in verse forty-two, we find him praying to God in these words, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: (the cup of crucifixion) nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." The obedience that he rendered to God, doing just what God wanted in the way that God wanted, was truly one of the finest qualities in his life.

Another quality that impresses all of us is found in the twenty-third chapter of Luke, the thirty-fourth verse. He was dying on the cross. Those that had led him to be crucified were mocking him, standing off at a distance railing on him. The Roman soldiers were about to divide his garments and cast lots for his seamless robe. At that point he says, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We could go on and on, but I guess the best summation of what he did is found in Hebrews 4:15, where the inspired writer says, "We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." There it is. He lived without sin. He never did anything that was wrong, never went anywhere that it was not right for him to go, never said anything that would displease God. This is the foundation out of which the second of today's themes comes. Out of that foundation he had the right to tell us how to live.

### The Things He Said

Woven into this same book of Luke there are the things that Jesus said. For instance, in the sixth chapter we find the beginning of the sermon on the mount. It begins with the beatitudes, as you know, and ends after a while with Jesus saying that those who hear his voice are like people who build their houses on rock, and those who do not hear his words and heed them are foolish people who build on the sand.

In the fifteenth chapter of Luke there are three wonderful stories: The lost sheep: the shepherd left the ninety and nine to go seek the one that was lost. The lost coin: the woman swept her house to find the one coin out of the ten that she had lost. The lost boy: the story that has reached more people in a deeper way than any other story Jesus ever told. It is the story of the prodigal son. All of these, told in one sitting, are recorded in chapter fifteen.

In the next chapter, chapter sixteen, Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus, and opens, as it were, the doors beyond the grave to let us see what happens after death and to let us feel the anguish of those in the other world in their concern for those back in this world who still have a chance but are not right with God. The yearning of that man in torment that his brothers back on the earth might have some additional chance to know God's will is one of the deepest impressions that one gets in reading the gospel of Luke. May it be when we have crossed over the river of death that we not have any regrets about people who have not heard the gospel because of our neglect.

So it goes throughout the rest of the gospel according to Luke. There are two sides of this scale--here is the life that he lived, the things that he did; here are the things that he said. Is it not a perfect summary that Luke uses as he opens the book of Acts? "I am writing another treatise, O Theophilus, to tell you the things that Jesus both began to do and to teach before he was taken up from the earth.

### Two Absolute Necessities

For a moment let us focus on these two things. Christ showed us how to live; and Christ told us how to live. This is the pattern for us. The matter of living Christianity is, of course, the first concern and to try to tell people about Christ and Christianity without living it first is like shouting into the wind. It will not be heard. There is nothing more ineffective than for a man to try to preach the gospel when those who hear him preach know that he is not living what he preaches. We have all said and we have all heard the expression, "Why don't you practice what you preach?"

The popular poet of the common man, Edgar A. Guest, wrote,

I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day,  
I'd rather one would walk with me than merely point the way.  
The eye's a better pupil, more willing than the ear,  
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear.

There is a kind of deep-rootedness about a person who really lives his Christianity that is as fine as anything in the world. There is nothing finer than to be able to say, "That man is a Christian all the way through. You can surprise him in his home anytime. You can follow him anywhere that he goes and anything that he is doing will be right." That is just solid ground, solid foundation.

But on top of that foundation there needs to be the oral teaching of the gospel. It is certainly unthinkable that one would teach by word without living it first, but it is also ineffective just to live it. Here is a point which many of us need to consider. It is not enough just to live a good life, There are a great many things that our neighbors and friends will never learn just by watching us get up and go to church on Sunday morning, though that is important. They will never learn some of the finer, more detailed teachings of Christianity just by watching as we go about our Christian living. So, in addition to living we need to say something. We might compare this to the way that God has revealed himself to man. He has done it in two ways. His first revelation is in nature. The starry universe, the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, the oceans, the trees--all of this is a revelation of God, and what a marvelous revelation! But by itself it was not enough, so in addition he gave the written word. We would never have learned of Christ if we had studied only the stars and the trees and the mountains. God had to reveal in his inspired book many things that we need to know. The devout Christian

man who is living his Christianity needs also to come to his neighbor and talk with him about Christ and his church. Christ not only lived; he also preached the gospel.

### Three Applications

I have chosen this theme for this particular day for a special reason. We are standing at the end of the summer and at the beginning of a new school year. Within a few days these doors there before me will open and through them there will come scores and even hundreds of young people, who will come to Nashville to go to college. Some of them will be young men who are being trained at Vanderbilt School of Medicine to be doctors. They will be young men of great influence in years to come. Some in that great university will become engineers or professional men of some other kind.

Some of those college-age young people will be studying at Peabody College to become teachers. What influence they will have in the years to come. Some will come from far off corners of the earth. In recent weeks we have had visitors from that school from Thailand and Korea. Still a larger number of these young people will be coming from David Lipscomb College. Some of them will be preachers of the gospel in time, and others will be wives of such. Some of them will be teachers and lawyers and doctors as time goes by.

So, to this congregation it seems to me very appropriate to say that we are just on the threshold of nine great challenging months and that we need to live Christianity clear and plain without any flaws before these young people, and then teach it in its beauty and in its power. It means that when they come to worship with us that they should see in us the qualities that Christ wants in his children. It means that in our worship, in our preaching from this pulpit and in the classes we must do a good job. I know very few congregations anywhere that have a more strategic place than this one, and because of what these young people will become we need to demonstrate before them an ideal church, a church active and vigorous in the Lord's work, a church made up of pure, consecrated people, a church that inspires them to want to go out and do likewise.

A second application of this theme applies to each one of us individually in our own neighborhood, among our loved ones and friends. Let us first of all live Christianity to the point that they will be impressed, and then let us have the strength and the knowledge to be able to talk with them in private about what they need to do to be saved. Let us live and teach in our own community so that souls will be saved.

The final application is one to parents. Oh, how we in our homes especially need "both to do and to teach." We need every hour of every day to be living before our children just what the Lord would have us live that they might see Christ in us. There must be no deception, no hypocrisy, as little selfishness as possible. Then let us find the time to read the Bible and to teach the stories and the principles of the Bible.

This past week as I read this opening sentence of Acts, it seemed especially appropriate for us just at this time and appropriate for Christians at all times. Let us always be among those who do and teach Christianity.