

February 4, 2024

God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Book of Acts Pt 1

Our theme for 2024 is God's Good News Story, Continued... "*The Church Alive & Growing*"

For the past few weeks, we have talked about the general aspects of WAHT & WHO the Church is. Two weeks ago we talked about **COMMUNITY**, and how we need each other. Last week we talked about the need for **COMMITMENT** to that COMMUNITY! **We saw the different descriptions and metaphors for the church..** A Fellowship, a Family, a Baby, a Flock, and an Army! Today we begin a series of messages on the early Church as found in the New Testament book of Acts. Acts is part of a two-volume work by a man named Luke. As you can probably assume the two volumes are Luke & Acts. A trivia fact to note is that Luke is the longest book in the New Testament with 1151 verses, and to add to Luke's fame, he is the most prolific writer in the New Testament. Yes, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than Paul (Paul wrote the most books. Luke wrote 35,306 words (27% of the NT) compared to Paul's 32,408.

Let's take a brief look into the man Luke, the writer and compiler of Acts. For such a prolific writer he is only mentioned by name only three times in the Bible, not one of them in the Books of Luke or Acts. They are found in the writings of Paul in Col. 4:14, 2 Tim. 4:11 & Philemon 1:24.

We don't really have a lot of hard factual evidence about Luke, but what we do know was that he was a Greek Gentile, possibly from Antioch in Syria. The only Gentile author of the Gospels. It is actually from the writings of Paul in Colossians 4:14, that we find him described as a Doctor. He seems to have a great command of the Greek language, and seems to have a love and knowledge of ships and records geographic details well. It appears that Luke was not present during Jesus' earthly ministry but became a believer after Jesus' resurrection and most likely never actually saw or met Jesus. He was close with Mark, Matthew, Peter, and Paul. Luke was one of the few that remained with Paul until his death. He was an extraordinarily detailed and capable writer, narrator and faithful disciple.

The Book of Acts is a link between the Gospels and the Epistles (letters). It covers generally the first 30-35 years of church history. It is the 44th Book in the Bible and the 5th in the New Testament. Acts begins with the Ascension of Christ @33AD and runs through to about 62-64AD with Paul in Rome in prison but still being a vibrant witness for Christ.

Acts is the story of the birth and growth of the early church. It provides a rich, accurate historical as well as spiritual description of the early believers. It shares with us the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the great growth of the church. It features Peter and Paul primarily, it shares with the tragedy of the first Christian martyr,

Stephen, it shares with us the powerful story of Paul's conversion and of his three missionary trips, and his arrest and imprisonment in Rome.

The purposes of the book appear to be (1) to provide an inspired record of selected events in the spread of the gospel and the church, (2) to show how the plans and purposes of God work out through history, and (3) to provide for a defense of the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts reveals the origin, nature and the function of the Church. Acts was completed before Paul's death.

A simple outline is:

- Chapters 1-12 describes the missionary work of Peter among the Jews.
- Chapters 12-28 shows the missionary expansion of church by Paul to the Gentiles.

A.C.T.S.

A Call To Share

A Commitment To Serve

A Community Transforming Society

Another Acrostic to help us get a clearer understanding of The Book of Acts is...

A = Active Acknowledgement of

C = Christ's Call of Commitment & Challenge

T = To Transform Through,

S = Service to Society by Share the Savior

Acts can be summarized as... *The Triumphant Expansion of the Gospel*. "It is a triumphant story of how the early Christian community in the power of the Spirit saturated their world with the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ". It is also a "book for renewal...it challenges us to open our hearts to the power of the Spirit that we might be faithful witnesses" to the power of God's Word and His Spirit to bring salvation, hope and victory. (NAS Commentary, Acts, Vol.26, Broadman, p. 72)

The Book of Acts opens this way...

Acts 1:1-8...¹ *The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,* ² *until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.* ³ *To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of things regarding the kingdom of God.* ⁴ *Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* ⁶ *So, when they had come together, they began asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"* ⁷ *But He said to them, "It is not for you to know periods of time or appointed times which the Father has set by His own authority; ⁸but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

There is so much in these verses that we could delve into, but I have already addressed some of it, but let's just focus on one simple but powerful verse.

Acts 1:8...But you will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My WITNESSES in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

“Jesus promised two things: **power and witness**. The future tense here has an imperative sense: “**you will (must) receive power**” and “**you will be my witnesses**”.

Let's look a little deeper into these two words...**Power & Witnesses**

The power they were to receive was divine power, the word in Greek is ‘*dunamis*’,
411 δύναμις *dunamis* {doo'-nam-is} **Meaning:** 1) strength power, ability 1a) inherent power, moral power and excellence of soul **Usage:** AV - power 77, mighty work 11, strength 7, miracle 7, might 4, virtue 3, mighty 2, misc 9; 120 (BibleWorks)

This “*dunamis*” is the same word used of Jesus' miracles in the Gospels. The endowment with the Spirit is the prelude to, equipping for, mission.” We are to ‘bear witness’, almost in the sense of a legal testimony, concerning the facts of the life and ministry of Jesus. (Pollhill.

NAS Commentary, Acts, Vol.26, Broadman, p. 85)

“The Book of Acts “clearly sets out the church's mission: ***world evangelism***.” It shows how the gospel message can and must cross any cultural, religious, or national boundaries. We can gain a powerful confidence that the message of salvation through Jesus, is not only possible to take to the world, but necessary.

Acts

- confirms the message (salvation through Jesus) we must bring, as well as
- describes the power (the Holy Spirit) to deliver it.

(Larkin, William, J. *Acts: IVP New Testament Commentary*. Vol. 5)

Acts 1:8 “*sets out what the church is to be doing until Jesus returns. Through a command-promise, Jesus tells His disciples of the resources, content and scope of their primary task*”. (Larkin, William, J. *Acts: IVP New Testament Commentary*. Vol. 5).

It is the task of the whole church, we are all ‘witnesses’ empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a Missionary force to reach the world with the Gospel,

The word ‘**witness**’ (3144) **μάρτυς** *martus* {mar'-toos} **Meaning:** 1) a witness 1a) in a legal sense 1b) an historical sense 1b1) one who is a spectator of anything, e.g. of a contest 1c) in an ethical sense 1c1) those who after his example have proved the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ by undergoing a violent death. **Usage:** AV - witness 29, martyr 3, record 2; 34 (From BibleWorks, 2005)

It carries the idea of someone who speaks from personal knowledge of the facts and their significance. In a sense we are to become “***expert witnesses***” in the courtroom of daily life in the world.

Put the two words together and we are to **be powerful witnesses of God's Good News Story!**

A key element is given to us as to how this is to be accomplished...it is through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 reinforces what the Old Testament passage in Zechariah 4 had already stated...

Zechariah 4:6... *"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty.*

"The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the believers is an empowerment as well as an authentication. The confident assurance that what we are witnessing about is the truth...and nothing but the truth!

If we are going to reach the world for Christ, we will not be able to do it in our own strength. The Holy Spirit provides both the EMPOWERMENT as well as AUTHENTICATION to be powerful witnesses!

ILLUS: At times we probably feel it would be so much easier if we could be like Lucy in the old Peanuts cartoon: Lucy says to Charlie Brown, *"I would have made a great evangelist."* Charlie Brown answers, *"Is that so?"* She says, *"Yes, I convinced that boy in front of me in school that my religion is better than his religion."* Charlie Brown asked, "Well, how did you do that?" And Lucy answers, *"I hit him over the head with my lunch box."*

Well, I don't recommend such a strong handed human pressure tactic, especially when we have something even more powerful and motivating than a "lunchbox over the head"...We have the infinite power and purity of God The Holy Spirit.

Remember this.... You and I are called "to be the instrument of Jesus Christ, His hands and feet and mouth, to carry out His will in the world.

What is the will of Christ?

There are three things that Acts emphasizes.

- **Imparting of *life* where there is death.**
- **Manifesting of *light* where there is darkness.**
- **Producing of *love* where there is apathy, bitterness, and hatred.**

Christ's love reaches through believers, His instruments, by the Holy Spirit. (<http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/acts.pdf>)

- **love for the Lord,**
- love for Christian brothers and sisters, and
- love for the lost in the world.

We see this illustrated in Acts. This is what Christ wants to do through Christians: empower us to be powerful witnesses that reveal and applies the Love of God to all people.

The Holy Spirit is the power of God that lies within us.

And He can assist in our witnessing:

- * By guiding us to people we can talk to
- * By giving us boldness to speak to others, and
- * By working in the hearts of those we care about to convict them of their personal sin, their need for righteousness, and the real possibility of the coming judgment.

Thus, we need to:

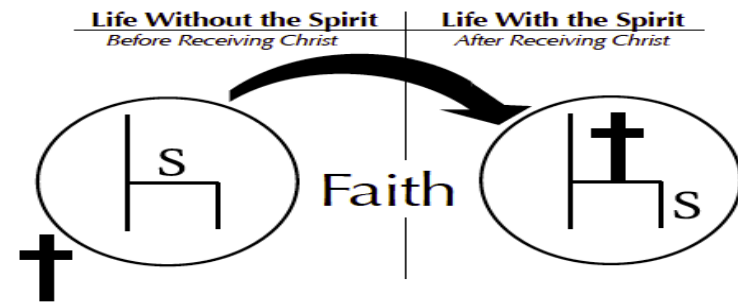
- * PRAY that God's Spirit prepares the hearts of people we want to talk to
- * TRUST the Holy Spirit to do His part
- * LISTEN for God to guide you to people to speak with
- * SPEAK about what God has done and what He means to you.

A skeptic promised British preacher Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) that he would attend his church for four Sundays on which Maclaren would be presenting the main tenets of Christianity. The skeptic listened intently to Maclaren's sermons. After the fourth message he presented himself for church membership, saying he had received Christ as his Savior. Maclaren was delighted and could not resist the impulse to ask which of the four sermons brought him to this decision. The skeptic replied, "Your sermons, sir, were helpful, but they were not what finally persuaded me." He said that after church one Sunday as he was helping an elderly lady on a slippery walk, she looked up into his face and said, "*I wonder if you know my Savior, Jesus Christ. He is everything in the world to me. I would like you to know Him too.*"

It was a simple comment, but with the working of the Holy Spirit, it changed a skeptic's heart as no power filled sermon could do.

One of the greatest tools for evangelism is a life changed and filled with the Holy Spirit. A Spirit-filled life is a great attraction for those who are desperate for hope, purpose and a true sense of life.

Look at this visual that gives us the difference between a spirit-filled and non-spirit-filled person.



Spirit- Empowered Life

- Is Christ-Centered,
- Trusts God,
- Obeys God,
- Has A Strong prayer life,
- loves God's Word,
- is Willing to Witness
- Displays Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness & self-control

Three important questions to ask yourself:

1. Am I ready now to surrender control of my life to our Lord Jesus Christ? (Romans 12:1, 2)
2. Am I ready now to confess my sins? (1 John 1:9)
3. Do I sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit? (John 7:37–39)

Invitation to Be a True Spirit-Filled Believer

- I am ready to surrender control of my life to God.
- I confess my sins and I accept God's forgiveness and grace.
- I choose to allow the Holy Spirit to fill me, guide me and empower me to live in a right relationship with God and with one another.
- I will follow His lead and share His love to all the world. Amen