

The Acts 29 Church

Summer 2005

July 31, 2005

‘Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Acts 28:31

The book of Acts ends with a sense of the on-going work of the spirit-driven church continuing to proclaim the kingdom of God. Whether it be the 1st century or the 21st century, there are key values that God seeks to burn white hot in the church of Christ throughout the ages. During this study we consider these values as we trace this revolution called the kingdom of Christ begun by the church that existed in Acts 1. It isn’t over as the church is the one and only hope for the world in living out this kingdom and seeking to bring others to meet Christ. There is nothing like the local church when it gets it right – when it is focused on its mission, when its values are clear, when those who don’t know Christ are brought into a relationship with the Lord, when those who know the Lord grow deeper in their faith journey and grow wider with the love of Christ, when the body demonstrates purposeful and persuasive unity, when compassion is real and the needs of the poor are addressed, and when the gifts of the body are deployed. It is sweet because Christ is honored and people experience God’s smile of shalom.

This series of the Acts 29 church is aimed at looking at the Acts church to see some of the core values that it lived out and how these values span all times however they need to be communicated in our current culture.

The following represents a short synopsis of the teaching of various sections of the book of Acts with some questions for the body of Christ to address.

Message: ‘Star Gazers or Earth Shakers’

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Main idea: The King is on the throne and the kingdom is here already and yet is not fully revealed.

Synopsis: Ascension Day is a red letter day equally as significant as Christmas, Good Friday, Resurrection Day, and Pentecost. It represents the victory day of Christ Jesus over sin and death. It represents the changing of the clock day moving into the Kingdom time. It represents the inauguration of the new King and this world placed under new management. Jesus Christ is on the throne. He sends His Spirit to us on earth and by the Spirit’s power we make a goal of our lives, the Kingdom of God. This is the church’s foremost business- the Kingdom of God.

But what does it mean practically for the church? This kingdom seems so out there. What does this kingdom look like? Does the church have a role in bringing the kingdom of heaven to this earth? How?

Questions for reflection:

What did the apostles understand by the kingdom of God? In what ways is your thinking about the kingdom similar to the apostles and in what ways might it be different?

What differences are there between power in God’s kingdom and power in human kingdoms? How is this relevant for you?

What are the radical political and social implications of the kingdom of God for you?

Before the Spirit could come, the Son must go. Why?

What are the main lessons which the ascension teaches us today? How does this affect you? How does this affect the purpose of the local church?

Message: ‘On your marks...get set...grow!’

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Main idea: Jesus Christ has gathered a new community whose mission is to live out the kingdom values.

Synopsis: There are volumes of books written on what makes a church a church. We turn to the template of God’s picture of the early church and four distinguishing marks which include:

- They were devoted to growing in the Word and Spirit.
- They were devoted to loving fellowship.
- They were devoted to connective worship.
- They were devoted to outgoing & ongoing evangelism.

Questions for reflection:

Why is it incorrect to call the Day of Pentecost the birthday of the church?

What is the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power in the church described in Acts 2:42-47?

How does the church to which you belong measure up to the marks of the church?

Why are anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit mutually incompatible? What does that mean to you?

To what extent should we imitate the early church’s example of having everything in common?

What aspects of the early church’s worship does Luke describe?

Acts church is governed by one dominant, all controlling motif. What is that? To what extent would the same be true of an account of your life or your local church?

What three vital lessons about local church evangelism does Luke draw out?

Message: ‘What would happen if ...?’

Scripture: Acts 3:11-26

Main idea: The believer can expect God to bring change.

Dwight Moody once stated: ‘The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully consecrated to God.’ The ACTS 29 church seeks to live out that fully surrendered life and experience the powerful presence of God moving through changed people. In this story, we read of the church which goes out into its community bringing hope to a man who was living without hope for a long time. They come not with a handout but a hand up – namely the presence and power of God flowing through their lives. The

church brings healing by giving which is a primary color of the ACTS 29 church. The church also colors their community with joy and wonder. The believer needs to continually ask the question, 'what am I doing that I couldn't do without the power of God making a difference in and through my life?'

Questions for Reflection:

Have you fully surrendered your life to the transforming power of God so that He can use you to make a difference in this world?

What are you doing that you couldn't do without the power of God?

What is striking about the healing that Luke describes here?

What are three blessings, according to Peter, that come as a result of repentance and turning to God?

There are two types of people in the world – givers and takers. Givers operate out of an attitude of abundance. Takers operate out of an attitude of scarcity. Which one are you?

Message: "What happens when a church prays?"

Scripture: Acts 4:23-31

Main Idea: The church is called to boldly pray in the King's Name.

Prayer brings results. God has given us the powerful gift by which we can exert influence in our world but it calls for humble and bold prayers. The ACTS church prayed and their place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

A praying church has the following characteristics:

- It is motivated by God's mighty acts.
- It professes faith in the power of God
- It expectantly seeks big things of God.
- It experiences the presence and power of God.

Questions for Reflection:

How does the church respond to threats in Acts 4?

What does the way they pray have to teach us?

What is the significance of their calling God 'Sovereign Lord'?

How boldly and expectantly are you praying? What signs and wonders do you seek of the Sovereign Lord?

Message: 'You Can't Fool God!'

Scripture: Acts 4:32-5:11

Main Idea: The church is called to be authentic.

Synopsis: God knows the heart. In this tragic story, Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be counted among the born again believers. But their commitment was not total. It is a serious thing to short change God and lie about it. They learned their lesson the hard way. The early church learned an awesome and fearful lesson; you cannot fool God. What do we learn about the ACTS 29 church? Here is a sampling of authenticity:

- They shared everything in common.
- They shared unity (not union) in Christ.
- They shared authenticity with each other.
- They shared Christ with the world.

- They were fully committed to Christ and the truth.
- They seek accountability with each other.
- Hypocrisy will not be tolerated.

Questions for reflection:

Is the way you live out the gospel of the kingdom 'good news for the poor'?

What are the characteristics of Barnabas that you seek to emulate?

What did Ananias and Sapphira do wrong? Why is this incident so important for the early church and for us today? What would happen if God would continue to discipline His body the same way?

Who is there in your life that serves as an accountability partner(s)?

Message: 'Doing our part'

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

Main idea: God gives us significant abilities for serving the kingdom.

Synopsis: The ACTS church was filled with the Holy Spirit and equipped to do ministry. This has not changed. God generously pours out His gifts on the church. Each one of us has a significant ability to serve Christ.

Questions for reflection:

In Acts 6:1-7, what are the problems which this incident reveals?

How did the apostles set about finding a solution?

How often are decisions in your church made like this? Why?

What was the essence of the apostles' ministry? What is the vital principle that this incident demonstrates?

What is your gift? How are you using it?

Message: 'The Dream Team'

Scripture: Acts 7 (selected verses)

Main idea: God calls leaders to move His people His way.

Synopsis: In Stephen's sermon, he describes the role of leaders who have shaped God's plan throughout history. Through this text, we see the qualities of spiritual leaders whom God has raised and continues to raise to lead His people. Those qualities include:

- Leaders take people where they are to where God wants them to be.
- Leaders have encountered God and experienced God's shaping their lives.
- Leaders lead according to the vision given by God.
- Leaders keep their focus on a relationship with God.
- Leaders lead with humility.
- Leaders lead in the face of opposition.
- Leaders seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
- Leaders finish well by preparing successors.

Questions for reflection:

Where has God called you to lead?

Who was the leader in your life who has influenced your faith journey the most? Why?

Reading through the message of Stephen, the leaders noted brought something unique to leadership at a particular time.

How did those leaders lead according to God's way?

What is the nature and purpose of Stephen's speech?

What parallels are there between the death of Stephen and the death of Jesus?

How did Stephen lead in the development of world wide Christian mission?

Message: 'Some things are not for sale'

Scripture: Acts 8:9-25

Main Idea: The ACTS 29 church is fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Synopsis: Master Card advertises all the wonderful things that you can purchase with its power yet the company honestly notes, 'there are some things money can't buy.' In Acts 8, we hear the story of Simon who wanted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the believer needs to recognize that the real Master offers power and riches out of this world but it comes to the humble of heart who surrender their life totally to His Lordship.

Questions for reflection:

Peter rebuked Simon for trying to buy power. What is discouraging about Simon's response?

Look at v. 16. Why is this a most extraordinary statement?

The two stage Samaritan experience is not to be regarded as the norm for Christian initiation into the kingdom. Why?

Why was it necessary for an official delegation to confirm the work?

How do we sometimes act like Simon?

Message: '180 degree turnaround'

Scripture: Acts 9:1-31

Main Idea: The ACTS 29 church is filled with faith stories.

The apostle Paul had a radical transformation that began 'before the foundations of the world'. He had the experience of 'taking off and putting on' which is key to the transformation process. He had the pedigree, the knowledge, the religiosity that made him dangerous and lost. Yet God turned him around in a radical way and gave him the eyes of faith to see the truth – Jesus Christ. The ACTS church is filled with stories of transformation. Some of them are slow growth stories while others are about God's radical intervention. God uses events and people to open our eyes to the truth.

Questions for reflection:

What in Saul's experience was unique to him and what must be characteristic of every Christian's experience?

What is inadequate about the view that Saul's conversion was due to brainwashing?

Of all the people you know, who would you say is the least likely ever to become a Christian? What is there about Saul's story to encourage you?

In these accounts, what evidence is there that Saul's conversion was due to God's grace alone?

God's grace is both gradual and gentle. Illustrate this from your own experience.

If you had been Ananias, how would you have felt about doing follow up work with Saul?

True conversion always involves church membership. Why is this important as illustrated by the ministry of Ananias and Barnabas? Can you think of people who have recently come along to your church who need to receive similar ministry?

Saul's conversion should persuade us to expect more from God in relation both to the unconverted and the newly converted. How does this apply to you and your non-Christian friends and colleagues?

Message: 'Barrier Free'

Scripture: Acts 10

Main idea: God calls us to break down barriers that prohibit others from Christ.

Synopsis: There were barriers for the 1st century church that got in the way of people meeting Christ. But Christ, the great barrier breaker, came to this earth to break the barrier of sin and also break those economic, social, gender, and cultural barriers that keep people separated from each other and calls for the ACTS church to do the same. Acts 10 & 11 reveal God's appointed barrier breaking plan but we also see the difficulties involved in breaking barriers.

Questions for reflection:

What was the extent of the divide between Jews and Gentiles at this time? Can you think of similar situations in the world today?

The principal subjects of this chapter are Peter and Cornelius who both experienced a conversion of sorts. Are there any similar prejudices which you can find in yourself?

God perfectly dovetailed his working in Cornelius and Peter simultaneously. What examples of divine 'coincidence' have you experienced recently?

It took four successive hammer blows of divine revelation before Peter's racial and religious prejudice was overcome. What were they?

Since God does not make distinctions in his new community, we have no liberty to make them either. Are you making any?

The gift of the Spirit was insufficient without the importance of teachers. How is this relevant today?

What are the barriers in your life that keep you from God or keep you from others in your community? What are the barriers that keep people from knowing Christ and fully belonging to His body?

Message: 'Becoming a Contagious Church'

Scripture: Acts 11:19-30

Main Idea: The ACTS 29 church focuses on the mission of sharing the Good News by being Good News.

Synopsis: There was something special about the church in Antioch. They were a community that was contagious and wanted others to catch what they had received. What were the ingredients of this contagious community? They were contagious for God as their lives were all about worship of their Lord and Savior. They were empowered by God in their service and in their caring relationships. They were the fragrance of Christ leaving in their wake – peace, hope, love, and joy.

Questions for reflection:

Why was persecution helpful for the spread of the gospel?

What did Barnabas do in verses 22-24? Why?

What happened to demonstrate that the new Christians in Antioch really were members of the family of God?

Would you say the 'hand of the Lord' is on your local church? How do you know?

What are characteristics of a healthy church? What should be the core values of a healthy church community?

What does the name 'Christian' mean? Where else do you find it used in Scripture?