

# Bearers of the Message of Life

Series: ROOTS: Rediscovering Our Foundations (Acts 1-6)

Brad Bailey – September 25, 2022

## Intro

**Today we are continuing** in our series **entitled Roots; rediscovering our Foundations**. We are seeking God to speak to us from the Biblical Book of Acts. The Book of Acts gives the accounts of how the church began following the resurrection of Christ. In essence... it is the **family story of the church**. **It is where we discover our roots**.

Jesus had called them into the ultimate mission.

I was reminded of the **Mission Impossible theme** song. The stories always begin with that moment that some huge mission is presented... and then the statement is made: 'This is your mission... should you decide to accept it.' Then it all begins.

Well... **Jesus invites each of us into a mission of eternal proportions** ... and today we see how it was accepted... and began for those who first joined.

## **Acts 2:1, 4-6, 12, 14-17, 21-24, 32-33, 36-41 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ...<sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. <sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ...<sup>12</sup> Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. <sup>15</sup> These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. ...<sup>21</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' <sup>22</sup> "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ...<sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. <sup>33</sup> Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ...<sup>36</sup> "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." <sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." <sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

## **A rather dramatic inter-change.**

The whole **scene is filled** with a **wild intensity**. There is **excitement**... as well as **hostility**.

A crowd has **swelled to massive proportions**... we can assume by the number who respond... that it had grown to **well over 3,000**.

They had **come as part of the feast of harvest**. Most had likely come at Passover 50 days prior... and been **drawn into the crowds that turned on Jesus**... played a game with Rome... to execute him. His

claims were deemed blasphemy. **Any who declare him to be the Messiah...** would now be **guilty of joining in blasphemy.**

**This is what fills the crowd** now surrounding the group on Pentecost ... and it is surrounded by this crowd that we read...

**Verse 14 - "Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice..."**

**The result is powerful...** three thousand lives joined in the life of Jesus. [1]

**What began** as just being **perplexed** ended in being **pierced.**

What began as just **confusion...** ended in **clarity** and a **crossroads** into new life.

**> Because Peter first stood up and raised his voice.**

Many of us know **what Peter may have felt...**

- 'People have so many misconceptions about ... they won't understand... they might think I'm crazy.'
- 'The truth about Jesus... and any thought of responsibility ...will make people feel threatened and angry.'
- Crowds can turn easily

Peter had denied even knowing Christ before... and **may have still wanted to sit down and shut up. But Peter stood up... and began to speak.**

**Why?**

It wasn't an act of mere **obedience... or obligation... or guilt.**

Peter **denied Christ three times...** but at the time he **thought Rome had won...** they had arrested Jesus and his crucifixion was being called for.

But that same Jesus met him... and was alive... and **gave him another chance** to join the new way of love. **Peter experienced radical love...** and he was going to give it. That is why he spoke up.

**> Because he really understood that Jesus had died for him....** and that he **would live forever in relationship to him.**

**It's important to realize** that Peter **wasn't trying to share** what he **hadn't experienced personally...**but **rather what he knew deeply.** [1b]

**He wasn't selling anything...**he was **sharing what he knew.**

**What we discover with Peter, is that the message is living... and life-giving.**

... and what I want to help us hear today...is that **we are to be it's bearers today... and how we can bear this message of life.**

What unfolds throughout the days ahead for this first group who have received Jesus... is that **many moments come.** The moments are different. It was never a matter of repeating a moment... we find that the **context changed...** sometimes **individuals situations...** sometimes with groups... **first with those who were fellow Jews...** later **Samaritans (part Jewish)...** and **finally Gentiles...** and those out into the eastern and western world.

So **our focus is on the core and common aspects** that arise in the many different moments in which we can share the message of life.... in your family, in your circle of friends, in your workplace, in your apartment complex, in your neighborhood.

What can we learn from this first sharing of the message?

**Sharing the Message of Life ("Gospel") ...**

## 1. Flows from that which first draws the attention of the heart or mind.

Notice that **Peter doesn't just stand up in a crowd...** he stands up **after something has caught people's attention.**

***"When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ... Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"*** – Acts 2:6,12

How are these people speaking in languages that others understand... and what does this mean? Something has come over them... some influence... are they drunk? What does this mean?

**God created us with wonder...** loved the children who never presumed to know everything... and we do well to encourage questions and wonder.

Jesus said he came **bringing signs and wonders of the kingdom...** from the power of prayer to the way of compassion and inclusion.

These signs **caused people's hearts and minds to wonder...** to which Jesus would expand and explain what was at hand.

**Jesus** shows is that...

- **Every person with a need** is an opportunity for the kingdom to be demonstrated.
- **Every social practice that didn't reflect true justice and peace...** is a opportunity for the kingdom to be demonstrated.

And so he **told his followers to go out in power and compassion...** to **pray for the sick...** and to **offer a cold cup of water** to those thirsty.

This is why **we value demonstrating God's love and power...** not only because it is **right...** and allows us to grow more into **God's nature...** but also because in doing so **we can build bridges to naturally share the Message of Life.**

**We have gained the community's attention** for being those who

- Host the largest coffee house...
- Who help feed those in need
- Who help the children who are most challenged as students.
- And so much more.

Those who don't yet know Christ...know that the Westside Vineyard are people who care about them. It is the right kind of attention.

This is why we **embrace the profound significance** of a timely opportunity to simply ask: **"Can I pray for you... right now."** It responds to a need in a way that allows people to experience God.

**Sharing the Message of Life ("Gospel") ...**

## 2. Flows from our common longings (... not our separation or superiority)

Notice that **Peter begins, "Fellow Jews..." (v. 14).. and later continues "Brothers..." (v. 29)**

There is **no sense** of **separation** or **superiority** at hand.

He identifies with them.

These thousands had gathered as fellow Jews...as those who were longing for something unfulfilled.

The Jews had longed for a Messiah to bring the peace and justice... to reconcile them with God... to fix a broken world. Peter identifies with them.

Read the whole book of Acts... the family story of the church... discover that they were **known for humility and hope.**

When you meet God in his own giving of life.... religious pride is displaced by humility... and fear is replaced with hope.

That is why the Scriptures call us to share the reason for the HOPE that is in us.

Peter reminds us that we are fellow humans... with have similar longings... who have faced similar confusion.

### **Sharing the Message of Life (“Gospel”) ...**

#### **3. Flows from our role as interpreters of the Divine Drama.**

Peter says... **let me explain...**

Peter is interpreting what God is doing.

**Six times, in eight sentences, Peter names God as the One at work in the events being discussed.**  
[3]

Peter was doing what Jesus had so often done... he is interpreting what God is doing. **He helps make sense of life.** From Jesus ... to this first message from his followers... and throughout the ventures in Acts and throughout history... the living message is that which picks up on what another already has experienced... and is trying to understand.

**In this case Peter has a lot to build upon...** fellow Jews... who longed for the Messiah... and who had been there 50 days earlier when Christ was crucified. Many of them had been drawn by the religious leaders to decide that Jesus was dangerous... too much a threat to the established order... and therefore, despite what was obvious... he must not be the Messiah. Peter is going to help them see the real drama at hand.

I find most people just think in terms of religion... and categorize Christ as being associated with Christianity...and therefore the whole of religion....and therefore with all the simple associations they have of religion. (Judgmental... divides people... and so on.)

What is so often needed....is seeing Jesus.

We can help interpret that Jesus confronted so much of what they have difficulty with.

### **Sharing the Message of Life (“Gospel”) ...**

#### **4. Flows from various sources which reveal Christ.**

It's helpful to note that **Peter draws upon different points of reference** to reveal the truth about who Jesus was. We are different and have different ways of seeing and settling truth.

- **He draws upon signs that point to Christ (v. 22)**

He refers to the works of Jesus...which continued through the disciples and can continue today through us.

- **He draws upon reason that points to Christ (i.e. prophetic revelation of Scripture)**

He shows how God had been speaking of such a figure... Messiah... savior long before...how Jesus fulfills what was predicted. He is drawing upon logic and reason.

- **He draws upon their testimony that points to Christ (v. 32 ‘we are witnesses...’)**

**The mission Jesus gave was that of being witnesses.** (Acts 1:8 and elsewhere. ) **He doesn't say,** "You will be my **defense attorney.**" You don't have to defend God. He didn't say, "You will be my **salesman.**" You don't have to be a salesman for God. All God wants you to do is He wants you to be a witness. **What is a witness? A witness is somebody who just tells what they have seen.**

- He draws upon the needs that point to Christ (forgiveness and the defeat of death.)

Sharing the Message of Life ("Gospel") ...

**5. Leads to that which is centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (the central acts of the Divine Drama)**

After responding to the rather cynical statement that they must all be drunk...Peter says:  
**"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus..."**

**So many other aspects** of what people may have experienced and now associate with 'Christianity'... **including many that are antithetical to God**... and which we should validate as tragically wrong. Peter's words... and every message that follows... reminds us that **Christ is the message... the way, the truth, and the life.**

Peter focus on who Jesus is and what he life, death, and resurrection mean. This is what often is referred to as the Gospel.. which is simply a term that means... the 'good news.' [2]

**These are the 'central acts' in the Divine Drama (vs. 22-24)**

**All that came before them... prepare and point the way.... all that follows** in the Scriptures is how we then live. But these reflect the center of the story.

The divine drama is that captured in the whole of the Scriptures... what Peter declares are the central acts that resolve all that came before... and out of which everything goes forward.

**1. The life of Jesus was unique – representing God**

***<sup>22</sup> "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.***

**2. Jesus died for a purpose – bearing our separation and restoring a relationship to God our Father.**

***<sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.***

Peter emphasizes God's purpose... because the people had sought a military leader to over thrown Rome... and Jesus came and died at the hands of Rome. He gave himself... was bearing the curse foretold of hanging on a tree.

**Rome didn't beat him... he won... which is what Peter now states...**

**3. Jesus rose – defeating the power of death**

***<sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.***

**Peter could stand up in the city where these events had taken place, less than two months earlier, and tell this people that Jesus had risen from the dead and not one voice challenges him. [4]**

**These are the central acts... pivotal... they are what God has done.**

**And this leads to the pivotal opportunity.**

***37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.***

They were **'pierced' in the heart**... it is a sudden realization. I think many of us have had that... it **cannot be created from outside** by another person. They realize they have waited for the Messiah... who they had killed.

Like the prodigal son... it is **the moment of 'coming to our senses'** and realizing.... We had tried to take the goods and go start a life apart from the source... and now realize we have rejected life itself. What must we do? Peter declares what Jesus had begun declaring... and what the whole of the Scriptures declare in various forms: repent and be baptized.

#### **4. We must turn around ('repent') and be united in life with God through Christ. ('be baptized.')**

**To repent means to turn around.** If you realize that you have gone astray... gone your own way... living in separation from God... we then have a choice to make. And it begins with a choice to turn around ...to turn back to God. [5]

And **be baptized is more than a religious ritual. It reflects the choice to be reunited with God... to be united in life with God through Christ... and identify with that publicly.**

This was a **radical decision then as much as now**... to admit they were so tragically wrong.

#### **What God has done forces us to face our pride today.**

Many will say but this makes an exclusive claim on my life. I can understand the problem at one level... but I believe at some level such a response, like others, is a reflection of our pride. It is like one who gives what is beyond imaginable... and radically undeserved by anyone... and responding with an objection for fairness. It's simply the wrong question when you are faced with mercy...a sacrifice that is so undeserved.

God wills that all should come. What lies before me is what I come to terms with as I face God... beaten and bloody... risen and exalted... who says... I forgive you... you may come home to the heart and house of life with God.

**"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." - John 3:16**

#### **Closing: It all begins with Peter's choice... to stand up and raise his voice.**

Our presence is the most fundamental aspect of sharing anything. It may come in the midst of lifelong relationships... it may be in the context of a moment (elevator, crossing paths in a school discussion, etc).

We may assume that it just happens... but it is actually a choice to be there not just physically... but spiritually.

**"But Peter stood up..." – in the midst of tension**... he stood up ...now he is really present... really there with them. **Will we stand up?**

#### **Acts 20:24 (NLT)**

**My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.**

It is the reason your heart is still beating. As Rick Warren says, there are only two things you cannot do in heaven. One of them is sin and the other is tell people who don't know it the Good News about God's love. Now, which of those two reasons do you think you're still here for?

**Resources:** Bob Briggs, John Hamby, Rick Warren

**Notes:**

1. This passage reflects the first message presenting the 'Gospel' by Jesus' followers.

Ewen Huffman notes that Acts contains many 'addresses'

- 20% is dedicated to addresses by Peter & Paul
- 25% if include Stephen

Peter... always willing to step out... He was the first to walk on the water, the first to draw his sword to defend Jesus, and as we will see today, the first to deliver the gospel message to the crowds in Jerusalem.

1b. In *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller talks honestly about his evangelistic misgivings before his faith deepened:

I could not in good conscience tell a friend about a faith that didn't excite me. I couldn't share something I wasn't experiencing. And I wasn't experiencing Christianity. It didn't do anything for me at all. It felt like math, like a system of rights and wrongs and political beliefs, but it wasn't mysterious; it wasn't God reaching out of heaven to do wonderful things in my life. And if I would have shared Christianity with somebody, it would have felt mostly like I was trying to get somebody to agree with me rather than meet God.

From: *Donald Miller, Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality (Nelson, 2003), pp. 115-116*

2. The word gospel derives from the Old English *gōd-spell*, meaning "good news" or "glad tidings". It is a calque (word-for-word translation) of the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον*, *euangelion* (eu- "good", -angelion "message"). The Greek word "euangelion" is also the source (via Latinised "evangelium") of the terms "evangelist" and "evangelism" in English. The authors of the four canonical Christian gospels are known as the four evangelists.

Originally, the gospel was the good news of redemption through the propitiatory offering of Jesus Christ for one's sins, the central Christian message. Note: John 3:16.[2] Before the first gospel was written (Mark, c 65-70),[3] Paul the Apostle used the term *εὐαγγέλιον* gospel when he reminded the people of the church at Corinth "of the gospel I preached to you" (1 Corinthians 15.1). Paul averred that they were being saved by the gospel, and he characterized it in the simplest terms, emphasizing Christ's appearances after the Resurrection (15.3 – 8). – From Wikipedia

3. John Hamby notes we see Peter pointing to God as the director: Verse 22, "It was God who worked miracles and attested Jesus to them." Verse 23, "It was God who delivered Jesus up to death." In verses 24 and 32, "It was God who raised Him from the dead..." Verse 36, "It was God who made Him both Lord and Christ." When the crowds saw something unusual they were ready for an explanation.

4. John Hamby includes the following, appearing to quote another source...

"The remarkable thing is that not one voice is lifted in protest in this whole crowd of people. To me, one of the greatest proofs of the resurrection of Jesus is right here – that Peter could stand up in the city where these events had take place, a little over a month earlier, and tell this people that Jesus had risen from the dead and not one voice challenges him! They knew that the authorities could not produce the

body of Jesus, thought they would have paid a king's ransom to have done so. They heard the wild rumors that spread through the city that Jesus was alive and appearing to his disciples from time to time. And there is not one voice who challenges what the apostle says."

5. NT Wright..... "What we are witnessing, in this passage, is the beginning of the Christian theme called 'salvation'. It isn't simply about 'going to heaven', though of course it includes the promise, not only of heaven after death but, beyond that, of resurrection into God's new creation. 'Salvation' is therefore pointing towards a very concrete and particular reality in the future. If God's ultimate intention was to 'save' only disembodied 'souls', that wouldn't be rescue from death. It would simply allow the death of the body to have the last word. 'Salvation' regularly refers constantly, not least in Luke and Acts, to specific acts of 'rescue' within the present life: being 'saved' from this potential disaster, here and now. That, of course, is something Luke stresses throughout his work. What God has promised for the ultimate future has come forward to meet us in Jesus Christ. We should expect signs of that future to appear in the present. And, whenever we are in a mess, of whatever sort and for whatever reason, we should remember this: we are 'turn-back-and-be-rescued' people. We are 'repent-and-be-baptized' people. We have the right, the birthright, to cash in that promise at any place and any time. No wonder 3,000 people signed up that day.