



The Mission Continues

Acts 14:27

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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Comparing today's church to the church in the book of Acts, pastor and author Jon Tyson writes, "We have more Christian resources available to us than at any time in history – numerous Bible translations, all available at the touch of an app, podcasts of the most gifted and popular speakers, videos, worship music, Bible studies, conferences, webinars, radio, and television.¹ ... In contrast, how did the early church capture the imagination of the Roman Empire while we, with all our resources, are slowly losing influence in our culture? The early church leaders did not have official church buildings, no social media, radio broadcasts, or celebrity pastors. They didn't even have the completed New Testament. Christ-followers were often misunderstood, persecuted, and gave their lives for their faith. Yet they loved, they served, they prayed, they preached ... and brought an empire to its knees."²

The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. The book is filled with dramatic events and incredible stories of faith. Those who were there heard His teaching and witnessed His miracles. They saw Him die and they saw Him alive again. They believed He was the Son of God. They were convinced it was true. They were compelled to talk about it. And they were courageous to take a stand.

So over the last four months, studying the book of Acts has been like holding up a mirror and comparing ourselves to the first Christians, and honestly asking, "Do we live like they lived? Does our church look anything like their church?"³ On the one hand, the way they lived rebukes us and humbles us. On the other hand, the way they lived challenges us and inspires us. These first Christians are our mentors, and we need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. The book of Acts says, "They turned the world upside down."⁴

The book of Acts records the movement of God. And we long for Him to move again. To do now what He did then! The book of Acts continues to be written, and today, we are living and writing our chapter. ***The mission continues. It's still about Jesus. And Jesus is calling us to be a part of that mission.***

A MOVEMENT OF GOD

In Acts, Luke recorded the birth of the church, the spread of the Gospel, and the movement of God.

ACTS 1 – THE MISSION. The book opens with the ascension of Jesus. And His last words before He ascended into heaven are recorded in Acts 1:8. Jesus said, "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" (Acts 1:8, NIV). This is the mission of the church. To "go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel," He said in Mark 16. Jesus is calling us to join a long line of followers and take the Gospel around the world and across the street. If this is not the mission of our church, then our church is not aligned or fully devoted to Jesus Christ. If this is not

my mission and your mission, then we are not aligned or fully devoted to Jesus Christ. They were witnesses, and so are we.

ACTS 2 – THE SPIRIT. In Acts 2, Luke reported the coming of the Holy Spirit. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4, NIV). In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was “with.” He was an external, temporary source of strength who occasionally anointed certain people at certain times. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is “in.” He is an internal, permanent source of strength who personally indwells every believer. That’s why Jesus told the disciples it was to their advantage that He depart. What could be better than Jesus walking with us? The Holy Spirit dwelling in us. The Bible says, “You are a temple of God” and “the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16). And the Holy Spirit empowers each of us to fulfill our part in the mission.

ACTS 2 – THE MESSAGE. And the message is still about Jesus. On the streets of Jerusalem, Peter declared, “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. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you (the religious leaders and the Jewish crowd), with the help of wicked men (Pilate and Herod), put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead” (Acts 2:22-24, NIV). The cross was not the end of the story. “God raised him from the dead.” The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God. And the message of the church, and the hope of salvation, is Jesus.

ACTS 2 – THE CHURCH. And oh how Jesus changed how those early believers lived. Acts 2 describes the church as it was meant to be. “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common, and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, and praising God. And having favor with all the people, the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47, NAS).

Acts 2 is a portrait of the church, a beautiful portrait of the bride of Christ. It describes a way of life, a way of learning, a way of loving, a way of worshiping, a way of sharing the Gospel.⁵ This is the church as it was meant to be.

ACTS 3 – THE NAME. Acts 3 is the story of a miracle on the front steps of the temple. Peter and John encountered a man crippled from birth, and Peter said to him, “In the name of Jesus Christ – walk!” Then “taking him by the right hand, Peter helped him up, and instantly, the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. And went into the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God” (Acts 3:7-8, NIV). He was 40 years old, lame from birth, and had never walked in his life. Imagine that moment. “Walking and leaping and praising God.” And the point of the story? The power of His name to heal proves the power of His name to save. That’s the Gospel. The name of Jesus.

ACTS 4 – THE PRAYER. Acts 4 describes how they prayed. “All the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God ... After they prayed, the place where they had gathered together

was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:24, 23-31, NLT). When they prayed, the Holy Spirit showed up. When they prayed, the place shook. They were a part of a great movement of God. And that’s what we pray for as well. For God to do now what He did then.

ACTS 5-9 – Then Luke told the stories of Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul.

Of Peter boldly preaching on the streets of Jerusalem and facing opposition and threats for doing so. And even though he was arrested and tortured, Peter said, “We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20, NAS).

Luke told the story of Stephen, the first martyr. Luke described him as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5, NAS). And when the crowd heard Stephen talk about Jesus, “they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him ... and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him” (Acts 7:54, 57-58, NIV).

Luke told the story of Philip, known as the evangelist. Acts 8 records the story of Philip and the Ethiopian. Philip explained how prophecy pointed to Jesus. Philip explained the Gospel to him, and the Ethiopian was gloriously saved.

And Luke told the story of Paul and his conversion. Paul was the famous Pharisee who hated Jesus and persecuted Christians. But on the road to Damascus, he met Jesus, and he too was gloriously saved. Paul went on to write most of the New Testament, and famously said, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

These four men were a part of the movement of God.

ACTS 10 – THE GOSPEL FOR ALL NATIONS. Then in Acts 10, Luke included the meeting of Peter and Cornelius. Peter, a Jew. Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter, a fisherman. Cornelius, a soldier. Two very different men had two very dramatic visions from God. Yet these two visions had one message. God spoke to two men, then brought them together to understand that the Gospel is meant for every person in the world. Peter said, “I now realize that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. The message God sent to the people of Israel, of the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, He is Lord of all!” (Acts 10:34-36, NIV).

ACTS 11 – THE HAND OF THE LORD. Then in one of the most encouraging verses in the book of Acts, Luke wrote, “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21, NAS). This is one of the most compelling verses in the Bible. It’s filled with promise, and we crave that as well. “The hand of the Lord was with them.” It means His presence. God with us. It means His power. His help when we need it most. It means His comfort when we are hurting. It means His blessing. Every good thing we enjoy comes from Him. It means confidence. Knowing the hand of the Lord is with us should fill us with extreme confidence and boldness.

Acts 11:21 is a description of the church then, and a promise for the church now. The hand of the Lord was with them, and oh, may the hand of the Lord be with us.

ACTS 16 – PHILIPPI. In Acts 16, Luke reported what happened at Philippi. He included three stories about three very different people. A businesswoman named Lydia, a demon-possessed slave girl, and a Roman jailer. And the night an earthquake shook the prison, where Paul was being held, the jailer cried out, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). To which Paul answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Lydia, a slave girl, and the Philippian jailer – three very different people. Yet all three had one thing in common – Jesus. And that’s our story as well. We are a church filled with very different people, yet with one thing in common – Jesus. “Amazing grace, who sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me ... I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.”

ACTS 17 – ATHENS. In Acts 17, Luke reported what happened at Athens. Athens was the center of intellect, sophistication, and culture. It was a university city built by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Many of the world’s great thoughts were born in Athens. The people were also a spiritually curious people, and they were curious to hear Paul explain this new religion. But “when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some laughed ... and some believed” (Acts 17:32, 34). It happened then and it happens today. Some laugh and some believe.

ACTS 19 – EPHEBUS. In Acts 19, Luke reported the clash of the Gospel and culture at Ephesus. Ephesus was an academic center, an entertainment center, a port city with goods coming from all over the world. Politics dominated Ephesus, with inscriptions on every building declaring Caesar as god. Ephesus was also home to 14 pagan gods. Yet when people heard Paul preach the Gospel and were converted, they stopped buying idols and it cut into the profit of the merchants. Demetrius was a silversmith who made shrines of Artemis, and he called all the merchants together and said, “Our prosperity depends on this business!” (Acts 19:25). The crowd became enraged and dragged the disciples into the amphitheater, and for two hours chanted, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” What was true then is true today. The Gospel will always clash with the culture.

ACTS 21-28 – PAUL. Then in Acts 21-28, Luke recorded the last days of Paul. Paul never wavered in defending his faith in Jesus. He took his stand before a Jewish mob and the Jewish council. Before Felix and Festus. He took his stand before King Agrippa, and in Rome, he stood before the emperor Nero. And he said, “My life is worth nothing to me unless I finish the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus – the work of telling others the good news about the wonderful grace of God” (Acts 20:24, NLT). And that commitment cost him his life.

The book of Acts is filled with dramatic events and incredible stories of faith. And those who lived during those amazing years believed Jesus was the Son of God. They were convinced it was true. They were compelled to talk about it. And they were courageous to take a stand.

The book of Acts records the birth of the church, the spread of the Gospel, and the movement of God. And that’s what we pray for as well. For God to do now what He did then.

STATUS REPORTS

Tracking the movement of God, Luke inserted several one-verse status reports. After Peter’s inaugural message of the church, Acts 2 says, “Those who had believed were baptized, and

there were added that day about three thousand souls ... (and) the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:41, 47).

Miracles began to happen all over Jerusalem, and so did persecution. Yet Acts 4 says, “many heard the message and believed, about 5,000” (Acts 4:4).

Christians were being put in jail for their faith, and in spite of that Acts 5 says, “More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number ... Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:14, 42). Acts 6 adds, “And the word of God kept on spreading, and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly” (Acts 6:7).

Again, so did persecution, and Christian families were on the run for their lives, dragging their children behind them. Yet Acts 8 says, “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). Persecution did not kill the church or silence the message. Just the opposite happened. The church expanded dramatically and lives were changed. These faithful, fearless believers “kept preaching the Gospel to all the cities” (Acts 8:40).

Acts 9, the church “continued to increase ... many turned to the Lord ... many believed in the Lord.”⁶ Acts 11, “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”⁷ Acts 12, “The word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied.”⁸

And in Acts 14:27, when Paul and his team returned to Jerusalem, “they reported all that God had done.”

The book of Acts records the movement of God. And that’s what we long for. That’s what we pray for. For God to do now what He did then.

CONCLUSION

These first Christians are our mentors. We crave their passion and we pray for their passion.

Historian Michael Green describes the early Christians when he writes, “They were passionately convinced of the truth of the Gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. (The Gospel was) the key to eternal life, without which they would perish ... They (embraced) the Great Commission. They sought to penetrate society with the Gospel which had such a profound effect upon them ... It affected everything they did and everyone they met ... In the early days, the quality of their lives was blazingly distinct.”⁹

As I said earlier, studying the book of Acts has been like holding up a mirror and comparing ourselves to the first Christians, and honestly asking, “Do we live like they lived? Does our church look anything like their church?”¹⁰ On the one hand, the way they lived rebukes us and humbles us. On the other hand, the way they lived challenges us and inspires us. The book of Acts says, “They turned the world upside down.”¹¹ How? Because they were convinced it was true, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to take a stand.

The book of Acts records the birth of the church, the spread of the Gospel, and the movement of God. And that's what we long for. That's what we pray for. ***For God to do now what He did then.***

NOTES

¹ Jon Tyson, *Sacred Roots – Why Church Still Matters*, Frames, Barna Group, paraphrasing and summarizing a long paragraph by Tyson.

² Ibid.

³ This theme is found in Francis Chan's book *Letters to the Church* and in Michael Green's book *Thirty Years that Changed the World*. In his book on the Holy Spirit, *Forgotten God*, Francis Chan writes, "There is a big gap between what we read in Scripture about the Holy Spirit and how most believers and churches operate today ... I believe that this missing *something* is actually a missing *Someone* – namely, the Holy Spirit ... I am tired of merely talking about God. I want to see God move through me and through the worldwide body of Christ. I know there's more. We all know there's more." [Francis Chan, *Forgotten Go* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), pages 16, 22]

⁴ See Acts 17:6.

⁵ Luke was not creating a list to be followed, but a life to be lived. Luke was describing the way of life of these first Christians.

⁶ See Acts 9:31, 33, 42.

⁷ See Acts 11:21.

⁸ See Acts 12:24.

⁹ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970, 2003), pages 17, 20.

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