



The Message ... It's Still About Jesus
Acts 2:22-41

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For 100 years, Kodak dominated the film market. One hundred years of American family photos were taken on Kodak film. But film became obsolete with the rise of digital cameras. Kodak was once worth \$30 billion and today worth only \$1 billion due to a failure to pivot to digital photography. For 130 years, Sears was the top retailer in America. Every household had the latest copy of the Sears catalog. At its peak, Sears had 3,500 stores across the country. Today there are only 5. Sears went down with so many retailers due to the rise of Amazon. For years, families ordered pizza on Friday night and stopped by Blockbuster to rent a movie. At its peak, Blockbuster had 9,000 stores across the country. But Blockbuster became obsolete with the rise of streaming services like Netflix.

When a company cannot keep up with the speed of culture and the speed of technology, that company is going out of business. Companies that do not adapt become obsolete.

Which raises a question. What about the church? Is the church becoming obsolete and irrelevant?

Today, only 30% of Americans regularly attend church. But according to Barna research, regular attendance is no longer defined as weekly, but as once every 4-6 weeks. Which means, of those who do attend church, they may attend only ten times a year. Even though we've seen some stirrings of revival on college campuses and a greater freedom to talk about Christianity in today's political climate, we still see a shift in our culture, and the church is less important than it used to be. So, is the church becoming obsolete like Kodak and Blockbuster?

Christian Smith believes so. He is the distinguished professor of religion at Notre Dame and in his book *Why Religion Went Obsolete*, he observes that lack of trust, lack of interest, and lack of significance has led to a drastic decline in religious involvement over the last 20 years.

Michael Gove, in an article defending Christianity, sadly agrees as he writes about the church in England. "Christianity is now regarded in England with condescension and dismissal, even active hostility. To say you are a Christian is to declare yourself intolerant, naïve, superstitious, and backward."¹ Gove states that Christianity in England has become a "toxic brand" and "completely irrelevant."

Jon Tyson, in his book *Sacred Roots, Why the Church Still Matters*, contrasts the relevance of today's church with the church in the book of Acts. "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."² ... 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 they brought an empire to its knees."³

That's why I say studying the book of Acts is like holding up a mirror and honestly asking, "Do we live like they lived? Do we do what they did? Does our church look anything like their church?"⁴ These first Christians are our mentors. The Bible says, "They turned the world upside down."⁵ And we need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world.

So is the church obsolete and irrelevant today? Absolutely not. Because our message – the Gospel, the story of Jesus, the story of grace and salvation – can change a person's life and determine a person's eternity! Our message is supremely relevant. And the book of Acts reminds us of that.

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. They 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.

And today, the book of Acts continues to be written, and we are living and writing our chapter. *The story continues, the mission continues, and it's still about Jesus.*

THE MESSAGE ... IT'S STILL ABOUT JESUS

The message is still about Jesus. And Peter demonstrated that in Acts 2.

Peter was just a fisherman. But when he met Jesus, he left everything and followed Him.⁶ Peter was the first to call Jesus "the Christ."⁷ He was the one who cut off the soldier's ear trying to arrest Jesus.⁸ Peter vowed to die for Jesus.⁹ Yet, after Jesus was arrested, Peter hid in the shadows and three times denied even knowing Jesus.¹⁰ But after the resurrection, after seeing Jesus alive again, after being filled with the Holy Spirit, everything changed for Peter. Luke records the first sermon of the church in Acts 2, and it simply says, "Peter, taking his stand" (Acts 2:14, NAS).

This is what Peter said. "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. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge, and you (the religious leaders and the Jewish crowd), with the help of wicked men (Pilate, Herod, and the Roman government), put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 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" (Acts 2:22-24, NIV).

Fifty days earlier, Jesus had been crucified. And during those fifty days, He appeared to many proving He was alive again. It was fresh on everyone's mind.

As the crowd gathered, Peter talked about Jesus. "Jesus of Nazareth ... this man." The crowds had seen and heard about the miracles and healings Jesus performed. They were undeniable. Even the Jewish priest Nicodemus admitted it, when he said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with

him” (John 3:2, ESV). To the crowd Peter said, “You yourselves know.” They witnessed His miracles with their own eyes.

Then Peter explained that it all happened according to the divine plan of God. “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge, and you (the religious leaders and the Jewish crowd), with the help of wicked men (Pilate, Herod, and the Roman government), put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23, NIV).¹¹

Isaiah 53:10 contains one of the most stunning and unexpected statements in the Bible. Isaiah said, “It was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and make his life an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10, NIV).¹² The Hebrew word for “crush” means to break into pieces, to pulverize into dust. Why would God do that to His own Son? Because Jesus absorbed our sin. Because He became our sin. And when He did, His holy Father had to turn away. Yet, the cross was God’s idea. The cross simultaneously demonstrates the holy justice of God punishing sin and the amazing grace of God forgiving sin. “It was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer” because it was the only way to break the bondage of sin in our lives, to free us, to rescue us, and to save us.

But the cross is not the end of the story. Peter declared to the crowd, “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” (Acts 2:24, NIV). Peter was declaring that the Messiah was not a victim, but a victor. The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true.

The message of the church, the hope of salvation, the story of Christianity is all about Jesus. Peter mentioned Jesus nine times in this first sermon of the church. Jesus is the message, and every page of the Bible points to Him.¹³ Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!” (John 5:39, NLT).

- “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, NIV).
- “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- Peter said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3, ESV).
- Paul said, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, ESV).
- Paul said, “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow ... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:7-11, NAS).
- And John ended his gospel account by saying, “Jesus did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written ... But these are written that you may believe that

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 21:25, NLT, John 20:31, ESV).

Is the church obsolete and irrelevant today? Absolutely not. Because our message – the Gospel, the story of Jesus, the story of grace and salvation – can change a person’s life and determine a person’s eternity! Our message is supremely relevant. And the book of Acts reminds us of that.

PROPHETS & KINGS POINTED TO JESUS

Prophets and kings throughout history have pointed to Jesus. In the first part of his speech, Peter mentioned the prophet Joel. In the second part, Peter appealed to King David to give authority to the message.

Peter quoted Psalm 16, where David spoke of the Messiah. “I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your holy one see decay” (Acts 2:25-27, NIV). Who was David talking about? The Messiah.

Then Peter said, “Brothers I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay” (Acts 2:29-31, NIV).

David believed in heaven. David believed in resurrection. And he predicted it. And Peter connected the dots for the Jewish crowd. “King David, our King David, told us of the Messiah to come. He told us of His resurrection. And now it has happened. The Messiah we have heard about our entire lives is Jesus, the man from Nazareth, whose miracles you witnessed, whom you crucified, and whom God raised from the dead. And we are witnesses.”

THE RESURRECTION PROVES JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

David predicted it, and God did it. Peter said, “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses ... Therefore let all Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:32, 36, NAS).¹⁴ Peter began by calling Jesus the man from Nazareth and ended his speech calling Jesus “Lord and Christ.”¹⁵ And how did the man from Nazareth become the “Lord and Christ”? *The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true.*

“Know for certain,” Peter said. Every other religious leader in world history is dead. Only Jesus rose from the dead. Only Jesus gave His life for us. Only Jesus conquered sin and death. Only Jesus is alive.

That's why Christianity ranks above every other philosophy, ideology, and religion in the world. That's why Jesus is superior to every ruler and king, every politician and philosopher, every actor and athlete, every celebrity and billionaire. Jesus is superior because He physically, actually, and supernaturally rose from the dead. And the reason His message is still relevant today is because through faith in Him, we can be forgiven of everything we've ever done wrong, we can experience peace within and peace with God, and we can have the hope and assurance of living with Him forever in heaven.

THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH

The message of the church is still relevant today, and it's all about Jesus.

“When the people heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37, NAS).

Imagine that moment, when hundreds heard the message and were “pierced to the heart.” I wish I could go back in time and interview some of those who were there, who were at that moment convicted and convinced. I can't do that, but I can show you a video of another Jew who was pierced to the heart when he heard about Jesus. Dr. James Tour is one of the most brilliant scientists in the world and here's his story. **[VIDEO]**

Dr. James Tour experienced the same thing those Jews experienced in Acts 2.¹⁶ Conviction of sin. A rush of reason. The lights came on. The dots connected. That Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, and the resurrection proves it.

When the crowd realized that, they begged Peter to tell them what to do. He said, “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” (Acts 2:38, NIV).^{17/18} “Repent.”¹⁹ Face the truth, that you have sinned against a holy God. Admit it and repent. And cry out to “the name of Jesus.” The Bible promises, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13, NIV).²⁰ When a person realizes their need for a Savior, and calls out the name of Jesus, He will hear, He will forgive, and He will save.

And that's what happened in Jerusalem. “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41, NIV). That night, 3,000 people went home changed. Imagine fathers talking to their children, brothers talking to brothers, neighbors talking to neighbors. Imagine the conversations all over Jerusalem that night.

CONCLUSION

So what are we to do with this story? Two phrases stand out in Acts 2. One for those who believe and one for those who do not.

When the crowd heard the message that day, thousands were “*pierced to the heart.*” If you're not a Christian at this point in your life, if you've yet to accept Jesus, understand that hope, peace, salvation, and heaven come only to those who believe in Jesus. Hope, peace, salvation, and heaven come only to those who have been “pierced to the heart.” To become a Christian, there

must be moment in your life when you face the truth about yourself, the truth about your sin, and say, “Oh no, what have I done!” To become a Christian, there must be moment in your life when you fall before Jesus and cry out to Him and say, “Please save me!” If you’re not a Christian at this point in your life, if you’ve yet to accept Jesus, I pray that you would be “pierced to the heart.” That you would see the truth about yourself, and that you would see the truth about Jesus. And that you would fall before Him and cry out to Him, “Please save me!” And if you do, He will.

And the moment you believe in Jesus, you will be forgiven of everything you have ever done wrong, you will experience peace with God and peace within, you will become a child of God and He will become your Father, you will experience the joy of knowing God and having a personal relationship with Jesus, and you will have the hope and assurance of one day seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven.

The second phrase that stands out is when Peter said, “***And we are witnesses.***” Those who were there saw Jesus with their own eyes. They witnessed His miracles. They heard His teaching. They saw Him die and they saw Him alive again. Even though none of us heard Him with our own ears or saw Him with our own eyes, we too are witnesses. Our witness is based on hearing the Gospel and Jesus piercing our hearts. We are witnesses of the love and grace of Jesus, and witnesses must tell what they have seen and heard.

So again I ask, is the church obsolete and irrelevant today? Absolutely not! Because our message – the Gospel, the story of Jesus, the story of grace and salvation – can change a person’s life and determine a person’s eternity! So may our hearts be “pierced” as well with a sense of urgency.

In his final words to the Colossians, Paul said, “Pray that God may open a door for the message ... Proclaim it clearly ... Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:2-6, paraphrase).

Our simple prayer should be, “Lord, give me an opportunity and give me the words to say.” And then the question is who? Who is God leading you to talk to? Who are you praying for? Who do you know and care about that needs Jesus? Again, a simple prayer. “Lord, please open the door for me to speak to _____. Give me the words to say. And may the Holy Spirit convict them of their need and convince them of the truth. As You open the door, may I open my mouth, and may You open their heart.”

The story continues, the mission continues, and it’s still about Jesus.

NOTES

- ¹ Andrew Brown, “Michael Gove is right – Christianity has become a laughing stock,” *The Guardian*, April 2, 2015.
- ² Jon Tyson, *Sacred Roots: Why Church Still Matters*, Frames, Barna Group, paraphrasing and summarizing a long paragraph by Tyson.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ 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*.
- ⁵ See Acts 17:6.
- ⁶ See Matthew 1:18-20.
- ⁷ See Mark 8:29.
- ⁸ See John 18:10-11.
- ⁹ See Matthew 26:35.
- ¹⁰ See Matthew 26:69-75, Luke 22:54-62.
- ¹¹ Two important truths are in that verse – human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Peter blamed the people for the cross – “you put him to death.” Yet, on the other hand, Peter said it was God’s plan – “handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge.” Jesus also knew suffering would come. See Luke 9:21-22, 9:44-45, 18:31-33. Darrell Bock writes, “Luke’s frequent usage (of “predetermined”) underscores his belief that God is very much in control of events that are tied to Jesus and included a plan for suffering as a part of Jesus’s calling.” [Darrell L. Bock, *Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), page 120].
- ¹² Another version says, “The Lord was *pleased* to crush Him” (NAS).
- ¹³ See Luke 24:25-27.
- ¹⁴ “Witnesses,” see Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8, 2:32, 3:15, 5:32.
- ¹⁵ Peter quotes Psalm 110, where David speaks of the Messiah as sitting by the right hand of the Father.
- ¹⁶ One for Israel, “A Jewish Scientist Makes A Jewish Discovery,” the testimony of Dr. James Tour.
- ¹⁷ At first glance, Acts 2:38 seems to suggest that a person must be baptized to be saved. But that’s not the case. When Peter said, “Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the forgiveness of your sins,” he was actually saying, “be baptized *because of* the forgiveness of your sins.” This is confirmed later when Peter said, “Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43).
- ¹⁸ The gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of regeneration, the miracle of being born again.
- ¹⁹ Turn from sin and turn to God. Turn from self and turn to God.
- ²⁰ Acts 4:12 adds, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved.”