

the book of **ACTS**

UNCONQUERED

From One Life to All Nations



Studies in the book of Acts

PART ONE: Weeks 1-6

Group Discussions

Personal Reflections



Group Projects for Fall 2014

September Group Project Ideas:

#1: Free Medical Clinic on Sat, Sept 13, 10am-2pm at Killearn Campus

Pray for:

- Wisdom & strength for Isaac Montilla (clinic director) & other health care professionals
- Many people to experience the love & grace of Jesus
- God's provision (volunteers, donated supplies, weather, clinic to run smoothly)

Serve:

- Pass out flyers in neighborhoods & apartment complexes
- Help with setup on Friday night and/or takedown on Saturday
- Greet & walk families and individuals through the clinic
- Serve meals (lunch is provided as a part of the clinic)
- Donate (list of supplies can be found at fouroakschurch.com/clinic)

Contact:

- Isaac Montilla (850.570.8783; dr.imontilla@gmail.com)

#2: Plan a Football Tailgate Party on Sept 20 or 27

Invite your friends to enjoy the game with your Fellowship group or other church friends.

October Group Project Ideas:

#1: "When Sinners Say I Do" Marriage Conference, Fri-Sat, Oct 10-11, at Killearn Campus

Pray for:

- Wisdom, joy, and strength as Pastor Dave as teaches the conference
- Many people to come and experience the goodness of God
- One couple who you can invite to come

Serve:

- Invite a couple to attend with you, particularly those who need Jesus
- Provide childcare help
- Greet, host, help with drinks & snacks, clean-up

Contact:

- Childcare volunteers:
(Contact Audrey Schmidt 850.385.6875; audrey.schmidt@fouroakschurch.com)
- Hospitality volunteers: contact Jo Leblanc (850.385.6601; jo.leblanc@fouroakschurch.com)

#2: Neighborhood Gathering

Plan a creative way to connect with neighbors, such as a BBQ, potluck, etc. , or participate in a neighborhood event already planned (e.g. , Killearn Lakes Fall Festival is on Nov 1).

Week 1

Acts 1:1-11



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Week 1

9/7/14

Text: Acts 1:1–11 (ESV)

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for 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 asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”



Context:

- As an introduction of the author, consider the following:

“Who was Luke and why did he write this?” Luke was not among the twelve disciples of the Lord. We know that he was a doctor. In Colossians 4:14, Paul called him “the beloved physician.” He probably came to faith during one of Paul’s missionary journeys. In the Acts of the Apostles (also written by Luke), we discover that the author seems to have lived near to Troas in Asia Minor (Acts 16). Luke trusted in the Lord Jesus, and began to accompany Paul. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke enters his own narrative but then, quite suddenly (in Acts 16:10–17), the reader encounters the word “we” in describing Paul’s travels, indicating that Luke had joined the apostle Paul.

- Luke seems not only to have been a painstakingly accurate historian, but a faithful believer and loyal friend, as is evident from the writings of Paul. The apostle wrote his second letter to Timothy as he prepared to stand before Caesar, approaching the end of his life. Having spoken with a broken heart of so many brothers who deserted him when he most

needed them, he writes, “Only Luke is with me” (2 Tim. 4:11).¹

- Luke writes a sequel to his gospel narrative in order to record the ongoing ministry of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the apostles.
- Theophilus means “friend of God.” This is the same audience Luke intended for his gospel. It is impossible to know if this is a distinct person, perhaps a benefactor, or simply a narrative tool used generically. Most likely, it was a distinct person in a class of people Luke felt necessary to refer to as ‘most excellent’ (a common title for Roman officials).
- He begins by outlining the highlights of Jesus’ life and resurrection as detailed in his previous work.
- This is written perhaps 30 years after the events it begins to record. Some scholars think Acts was written around 70 AD, but at the end of Acts, Luke does not indicate knowledge of Nero’s persecution or Paul’s death, both of which took place in the mid 60s.
- The account in Acts 1 closely parallels the record of Luke 24.

¹ Gavin Childress, *Opening up Luke’s Gospel* (Opening Up Commentary; Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 8–10.



For Personal Reflection:

- Turn back in your bibles and read Luke 24:36-53. What connection does Jesus make between his purpose and the witness of the apostles in the world in verses 46-48? Is one aspect foundational and the other optional?

- According to verse 49, how is this witnessing to be accomplished?

- What is the testimony of the apostles based on, according to Acts 1:3?

- What does the “scope” of the Christian witness (encompassing the whole world) teach us about the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit? How is this reflected in Matthew 28:19-20?



Group Discussion:

- What expectations does the group have for our study in the book of Acts? What do you hope to learn together?

- What are the major questions, if any, from the sermon on Sunday?

- Read the following and discuss the implications of being on mission “in community.”

In Acts 1 and 2 we see that Jesus prepared both the understandings and the whole lives of his disciples before he sent them out. He gave them both truth and power. But notice that this preparation came in the context of community. They did not learn and grow into “sentness” as individuals. They received both the necessary truth and power in community. Your fellowship group community will be the setting for you to prepare yourselves for the same great experience and service.²

- In what ways can your experience in a group equip you for witness?

One Life:

² Excerpted from Evangelism: Studies In The Book of Acts, Redeemer Presbyterian Church.



One Life:

Global mission is a big task. All nations. Unreached people groups. In order to make the task more concrete and applicable, we are asking each of you to identify just one person throughout the Acts series. This person will be the object of your intentional prayer, love, generosity, service and relational connection. The gospel transforms the world but begins individually. It begins with one life.

Who might that person be for you? Begin praying for clarity and begin to creatively scheme a way to engage them in the coming months.

Short Reading:³

“Here Luke tells us how he thinks of his two-volume work on the origins of Christianity, which constitutes approximately one quarter of the New Testament. He does not regard volume one as the story of Jesus Christ from his birth through his sufferings and death to his triumphant resurrection and ascension, and volume two as the story of the

church of Jesus Christ from its birth in Jerusalem through its sufferings by persecution to its triumphant conquest of Rome some thirty years later. For the contrasting parallel he draws between his two volumes was not between Christ and his church, but between two stages of the ministry of the same Christ. In his former book he has written about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, since he was ‘powerful in word and deed before God and all the people’; in this his second book (he implies) he will write about what Jesus continued to do and to teach after his ascension, especially through the apostles whose sermons and authenticating ‘sings and wonders’ Luke will faithfully record. Thus Jesus’ ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles. Moreover, the watershed between the two was the ascension. Not only did it conclude Luke’s first book and introduce his second (Acts 1:9), but it terminated Jesus’ earthly ministry and inaugurated his heavenly ministry.

What, then, is the correct title for Luke’s second volume? Its popular name, especially in the United States, is ‘the Book of Acts’, and this is justified by the

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 32–34.



fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus in which it is headed simply Praxeis, 'Acts'. But this neither tells us whose acts Luke is portraying, nor helps to distinguish his book from the later apocryphal works like the second-century Acts of John, Acts of Paul and Acts of Peter, and the third-century Acts of Andrew and Acts of Thomas. These were pious romances intended to enhance the reputation of the apostle concerned, especially by legendary miracles, and usually to promote under his patronage some unorthodox tendency.

The traditional title since the second century has been 'The Acts of (the) Apostles', with or without the definite article. And certainly it is apostles who occupy the center of Luke's stage—first Peter and John (chapters 1–8), then Peter on his own (chapters 10–12), James as chairman of the Jerusalem Council (chapter 15), and especially Paul (chapters 9 and 13–28). Yet this title is too man-centered; it omits the divine power by which the apostles spoke and acted.

Others have proposed the title 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit', for example, Johann Albrecht Bengel in the eighteenth century. He wrote that Luke's second volume 'describes not so much the

Acts of the Apostles as the Acts of the Holy Spirit, even as the former treatise contains the Acts of Jesus Christ'. The concept was popularized by Arthur T. Pierson whose commentary (1895) was published with this title:

This book we may, perhaps, venture to call the Acts of the Holy Spirit, for from first to last it is the record of his advent and activity. Here he is seen coming and working... But (sc. only) one true Actor and Agent is here recognized, all other so-called actors or workers being merely his instruments, an agent being one who acts, an instrument being that through which he acts.

Pierson ends his book with a stirring challenge:

Church of Christ! The records of these acts of the Holy Ghost have never reached completeness. This is the one book which has no proper close, because it waits for new chapters to be added so fast and so far as the people of God shall reinstate the blessed Spirit in his holy seat of control.

This, to be sure, is a healthy corrective. Throughout Luke's narrative there are references to the promise, gift, outpouring, baptism, fullness, power, witness and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It would

be impossible to explain the progress of the gospel apart from the work of the Spirit. Nevertheless, if the title ‘the Acts of the Apostles’ over-emphasizes the human element, ‘the Acts of the Holy Spirit’ over-emphasizes the divine, since it overlooks the apostles as the chief characters through whom the Spirit worked. It is also inconsistent with Luke’s first verse which implies that the acts and words he reports are those of the ascended Christ working through the Holy Spirit who, as Luke knows, is ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ (Acts 16:7). The most accurate (though cumbersome) title, then, which does justice to Luke’s own statement in verses 1 and 2, would be something like ‘The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his Apostles’.

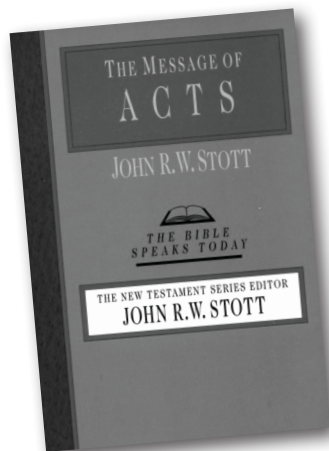
Luke’s first two verses are, therefore, extremely significant. It is no exaggeration to say that they set Christianity apart from all other religions. These regard their founder as having completed his ministry during his lifetime; Luke says Jesus only began his. True, he finished the work of atonement, yet that end was also a beginning. For after his resurrection, ascension and gift of the Spirit he continued his work, first and foremost through the unique foundation

ministry of his chosen apostles and subsequently through the post-apostolic church of every period and place. This, then, is the kind of Jesus Christ we believe in: he is both the historical Jesus who lived and the contemporary Jesus who lives. The Jesus of history began his ministry on earth; the Christ of glory has been active through his Spirit ever since, according to his promise to be with his people ‘always, to the very end of the age’.

For Further Reading:

The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Acts

- John Stott



Notes:

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Week 2

Acts 1:12-26



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Week 2

9/14/14

Text: Acts 1:12–26 (ESV)

12 **T**hen they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

13 And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. 14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, 16 “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of

David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

17 For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” 18 (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. 19 And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 “For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

“‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’;

and



“Let another take his office.’

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” 23 And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas,

who was also called Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Context:

- Our text opens with the disciples walking (figuratively and literally!) in obedience to Jesus’ command. “Wait in Jerusalem” was the instruction they received.
- Again we see a companion account to Luke 24. In Luke 24:50-53, Jesus leads the disciples to Bethany, which is a city on the eastern edge of the Mount of Olives. From there, He ascends and the disciples proceed back to Jerusalem rejoicing.
- The Mount of Olives is a small mountain range just $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to the east of Jerusalem. “A Sabbath-day’s journey” simply meant the distance without indicating the day of the ascension. The Mount of Olives is referenced frequently in scripture. David retreats there (2 Samuel 15:30), Solomon builds a high place there (1 Kings 11:7), and Jesus foretells the end of days in the Olivet discourse from this mountain (Matthew 24:3).
- Luke lists the 11 apostles (the same as his list in Luke 6) to highlight the core of the early church. In addition, this list helps to set-up Peter’s speech

concerning Judas and the decision of the apostles to name a replacement.

- Prayer, unified and persistent prayer, is immediately a mark of the disciples. They had learned well from Jesus who was marked by prayer in such a way as to have his disciples beg of him: “Lord, teach us to pray.”
- The number of disciples is mentioned to be 120, which indicates that the record of Jesus’ ministry has focused on the 12 but has not been limited to them. Furthermore, this seemingly unimportant detail would have tipped off Jewish readers that the size of the group was big enough to be authoritative. A Jewish law stated that the minimum number of men to establish a council was 120.
- We do not know exactly what to make of the appointment of Matthias as a replacement for Judas (some have surmised it was a mistake). Perhaps,

it helpful to offer the following comments and go no further:

- » The disciples felt an impetus to multiply and replace leadership. This will be a key aspect in the development of the church moving forward.
- » We find clear description of an apostle in this passage. To have been with Jesus from the beginning and witness to the resurrection are the foundational requirements.
- » “Casting lots,” though confusing, is not a method of gambling or chance. It was a way to lean on and trust the sovereignty of God in the choice. We find the practice of casting lots at least 20 times in the OT (eg. Num 26:55).



For Personal Reflection:

- When Peter quotes scripture ('the Scripture had to be fulfilled') and when they pray ('You, Lord, who know the hearts of all') what sort of theology are they putting into practice?

- What do they believe about God and about His word?

- What role did the Holy Spirit play in Scripture?

- Do you have areas of your life where it might help to recommit the direction and outcome to God's sovereign care?

- Turn to Matthew 19:28. What about Jesus' prophecy may have led the apostles to replace Judas?



- What do Acts 1:14 and Acts 1:24 teach us about the nature of the church?

- What place should corporate prayer have in the life of the church?

- What would it look like for the church to embody the phrase, “with one accord” in Acts 1:14?

- What was Judas allotted a share in, according to Acts 1:17? What ministry was this?

- How did experience with Jesus qualify these men to be “witnesses?”

- Turn to 2 Corinthians 5:11. Read 11-21. What ministry have we been given?



Group Discussion:

- Share instances you've seen God's providence the last few months.

- How can your group encourage a view of God's word that mirrors the early church?
(i.e. , The scripture must be fulfilled)

- How do the prayers of your group reflect a confidence in God's sovereignty?

- 4 times in verses 21 and 22, we find the word "us." What does this corporate emphasis tell us about the way the early church prepared for mission?



One Life:

Effective engagement with neighbors, co-workers and friends can be intimidating. We often feel as though our words must be perfect, our planning precise and our modeling exemplary. It is possible to get completely stifled by a need to perform. This, of course, would be entirely normal were the task of salvation up to us. By God's grace, it is not. Consider the following from the book of Corinthians in light of our Acts study this week.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 (ESV)

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

What kind of freedom can we walk in when we remember this truth? Are there aspects of spiritual conversations and engagements that you are being burdened by and you need to give up the pressure? Begin to pray for One Life like the disciples in Acts 1, "Lord, You know the hearts of all men."

Short Reading¹:

Prayer is a special exercise of faith. Faith makes the prayer acceptable because it believes that either the prayer will be answered, or that something better will be given instead. This is why James says, "Let him who asks of God not waver in faith, for if he waivers, let him not think he shall receive anything from the Lord." This is a clear statement which says directly; he who does not trust will receive nothing, neither that which he asks nor anything better.

Jesus himself has said, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24 ESV). And in Luke 11 he said, "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,

¹ Excerpts from Martin Luther (Table talk and Treatise on Good Works) taken from Devotional Classics.



how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Are we so hard of heart that these words of Jesus do not move us to pray with confidence, joyfully and gladly? So many of our prayers must be reformed if we are to pray according to these words. To be sure, all of the churches across the land are filled with people praying and singing, but why is it that there is so little improvement, so few results from so many prayers? The reason is none other than the one which James speaks of when he says, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (James 4:3). For where this faith and confidence is not in prayer, the prayer is dead.

From this it follows that the one who prays correctly never doubts that the prayer will be answered, even if the very thing for which ones prays is not given, For we are to lay our need before God in prayer but not prescribe to God a measure, manner, time, or place. We must leave that to God, for he may wish to give it to us in another, perhaps better, way than we think is best. Frequently we do not know what to pray as St. Paul says in Romans 8, and we know that

God’s ways are above all that we can ever understand as he says in Ephesians 3. Therefore, we should have no doubt that our prayer is acceptable and heard, and we must leave to God the measure, manner, time, and place, for God will surely do what is right.

No one can believe how powerful prayer is and what it can effect, except those who have learned it by experience. It is important when we have a need to go to God in prayer. I know, whenever I have prayed earnestly, that I have been heard and have obtained more than I prayed for. God sometimes delays, but He always comes.

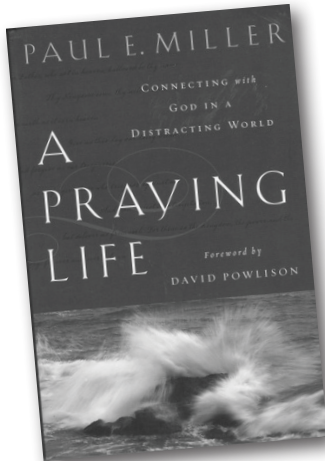
It is amazing that a poor human creature is able to speak with God’s high Majesty in heaven and not be afraid. When we pray, the heart and the conscience must not pull away from God because of our sins and our unworthiness, or stand in doubt, or be scared away. When we pray we must hold fast and believe that God has heard our prayer. It was for this reason that the ancients defined prayer as an *Ascensus mentis ad Deum*, “a climbing up of the heart unto God.”



For Further Reading:

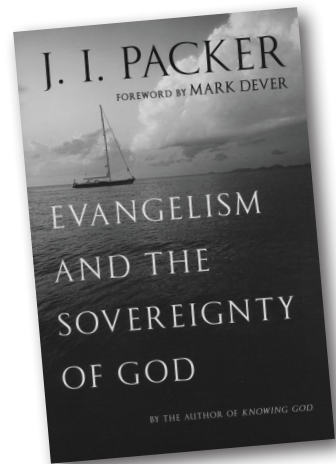
A Praying Life

- Paul Miller



Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God

- JI Packer



Notes:

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Week 3

Acts 2:1-13



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Week 3

9/21/14

Text: Acts 2:1–13 (ESV)

1 **W**hen the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in

his own language. **7** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” **12** And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” **13** But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”



Context:

- Pentecost was a Jewish feast placed 50 days after the beginning of the harvest season. In general, the harvest season began at Passover and ended at Pentecost--so it has been roughly 50 days since Jesus reclined with his disciples at the Lord's Supper.
- It has also been noted that Pentecost was often celebrated as an anniversary of the Law given from Mt. Sinai, which was said to have taken place 50 days after the exodus.
- Acts chapter 2 continues the consistent emphasis on the unity of the disciples. They were "all together in one place."
- The word for "wind" in Acts 2:2 is the same word used in the Greek translations of Genesis 2:7 when God "breathed" life into Adam. This wind is God-uttered and therefore life giving.
- Three times in Acts 2:1-13 we find the word "filled" (πληρώω). The room was filled, the disciples were filled with the Spirit, and the crowd mocked

them as filled with wine. Total indwelling is the emphasis here.

- The gathering of many nations was a demonstrable indication that God intended for the gospel to reach the ends of the earth. Consider the following from John Stott:

"Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly than this the multi-racial, multi-national, multi-lingual nature of the kingdom of Christ. Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel. At Babel human languages were confused and the nations were scattered; in Jerusalem the language barrier was supernaturally overcome as a sign that the nations would now be gathered together in Christ, prefiguring the great day when the redeemed company will be drawn 'from every nation, tribe, people and language'.¹ Besides, at Babel earth proudly tried to ascend to heaven, whereas in Jerusalem heaven humbly descended to earth."²

¹ Gn. 11:1-9; Rev. 7:9.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 68.



For Personal Reflection:

- Compare and contrast this incident in Acts 2:1-4 with: Acts 4:31; 7:55; 13:9; Luke 1:41, 67; 3:21-22; 4:1. In what ways is Pentecost unique, and in what ways is it repeatable?

- What does the imagery of the Holy Spirit (mighty rushing wind, fire) tell us about the relationship between the Spirit and our mission? What words could you use to describe how the Spirit aids our mission?

- Read John 3:8. How does Jesus' explanation of the "wind" fit with the word Luke uses to introduce the Holy Spirit ('suddenly')?

- When the disciples were given power to witness, what did they speak, according to Acts 2:11?



Group Discussion:

- What was particularly helpful from the sermon this week? Were there aspects of this text that were made clear?

- What role does the work of the Holy Spirit play in your life? What has your experience been in pursuing the power of the Spirit. Discuss your understanding and experience with the Holy Spirit with your group.

- As you consider engaging your neighborhood with the gospel, how should your group be specifically praying in reference to the Holy Spirit?



One Life:

Have you considered what an impossible thing it is to engage someone concerning eternal things? Every single thing you might have been praying for the person you are attempting to love well requires a supernatural power. Take some time this week to confess your need of the Holy Spirit, and contemplate what it will look like for you to cast yourself upon His power in all of your relationships.

Short Reading¹:

One of the areas we desperately need to examine is how we think about and relate to the Holy Spirit. As I said previously, if you or I had never been to a church and had read only the Old and New Testaments, we would have significant expectations of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Think about it. Upon foretelling His death, Jesus comforts the disciples by telling them that “another Counselor” is coming (John 14:16 NIV). In John 16:7 He goes so far as to say it is to their advantage that He leave so the Counselor can come. And in Acts 1:4–5, after His death and resurrection, He tells His disciples to

stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. (The disciples obey because that’s what people do when someone rises from the dead and gives instructions.) Jesus’ disciples had no idea what or whom they were waiting for, or what it would be like. But they were expectant and trusting because Jesus had instructed them to wait for this good gift.

Then in Acts 2, we see the fulfillment of this promise in a way that must have shocked the disciples. The Holy Spirit’s power is unleashed like no one had ever seen or experienced before, and Peter shares the amazing promise that this Holy Spirit is available to anyone who believes. The Epistles tell us of the Holy Spirit’s amazing power at work in us, our Spirit-enabled ability to put our sin to death through Him, and the supernatural gifts He gives us. If we read and believed these accounts, we would expect a great deal of the Holy Spirit. He would not be a mostly forgotten member of the Godhead whom we occasionally give a nod of recognition to, which is what He has become in most American churches. We would expect our new life with the Holy Spirit to look radically different from our old life without Him.

¹ Chan, Francis. *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*. David C Cook.



Yet this is not the way it is for most people. We don't live this way. For some reason, we don't think we need the Holy Spirit. We don't expect the Holy Spirit to act. Or if we do, our expectations are often misguided or self-serving. Given our talent set, experience, and education, many of us are fairly capable of living rather successfully (according to the world's standards) without any strength from the Holy Spirit.

Even our church growth can happen without Him. Let's be honest: If you combine a charismatic speaker, a talented

worship band, and some hip, creative events, people will attend your church. Yet this does not mean that the Holy Spirit of God is actively working and moving in the lives of the people who are coming. It simply means that you have created a space that is appealing enough to draw people in for an hour or two on Sunday. It certainly does not mean that people walk out the doors moved to worship and in awe of God. People are more likely to describe the quality of the music or the appeal of the sermon than the One who is the reason people gather for "church" in the first place.

Notes:



Week 4

Acts 2:14-41



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Week 4

9/28/14

Text: Acts 2:14–41 (ESV)

¹⁴ **B**ut Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the

earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

²² “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him,



“I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

29 “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David

did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.”

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “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. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.



Context:

- The Holy Spirit has fallen on all 120 of the disciples but there remains a significant ministry of the apostles. Peter is introduced as “standing with the eleven” which indicates that the apostles would have a central role in the early church.
 - Peter uses the miraculous events that preceded this moment to declare the gospel. This is a consistent pattern in scripture. Miracles always serve as signs pointing to the reality and goodness of God.
 - Commentators note that Luke recorded Peter’s sermon in an outline form. This was most likely not the entirety of his sermon word for word. This is evident from verse 40, “and with many other words he bore witness.”
- Peter is quick to connect the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to Jesus. He does this via OT prophecy which reminds us that the scriptures are a unified whole. To understand the NT we must understand the foundation of the OT.
 - A major number of OT prophecies concerning Jesus are connected to King David. Peter uses references to David’s writing in Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 to show that David was moved to write things that could not have been about himself. This is also why the book of Matthew begins with a long genealogy connecting Jesus to the line of David.
 - Peter understands the significance of the Holy Spirit only in relationship to the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Jesus. Note verses 32-33.



For Personal Reflection:

- Read 1 Samuel 17:46-47. According to David, why did God miraculously deliver Goliath into his hands? How does this help us answer why the Spirit falls the way it does in Acts 2?

- Peter was moved by the Spirit of God to reflect on OT prophecy immediately following this miraculous event. He must have been very familiar with scripture and was able to apply it when the moment of witness arose. Do you see a connection between your diligent study and your opportunity to declare the gospel?

- When those listening to Peter heard the gospel they were “cut to the heart.” Do you “hear” the scripture in such a way? Have you been tempted to approach the Word of God as an intellectual exercise only?



Group Discussion:

- What was particularly helpful from the sermon this week? Were there aspects of this text that were made clear?

- Is there any aspect of text or teaching that you have struggled with understanding or applying to your life?

- Describe to the group a time when the teaching or reading of scripture profoundly affected you to the point that you could say you were “cut to the heart.” What truths were you wrestling with at the time? How did it change your heart, outlook or behavior?



One Life:

We've learned that the success of our witness is connected specifically to the supernatural work of the Spirit. In your attempts to love, serve, and engage your neighbor, friend or co-worker, have you relied on the power of the Holy Spirit? Take time to pray this week that God would empower you and that the Spirit would come "suddenly" and with power upon the person you are engaging. After all, every one who enters the kingdom of God must be born again. Consider using Ephesians 1:15-23 as a template for this kind of praying. Though you have not "heard of" their faith, you might boldly ask God to give them a Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Short Reading¹:

What Is "Being Filled With the Spirit"? Yet an even more commonly used term in the New Testament is "being filled with the Holy Spirit." Because of its frequent use in contexts that speak

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 781-784.

of Christian growth and ministry, this seems to me to be the best term to use to describe genuine "second experiences" today (or third or fourth experiences, etc.). Paul tells the Ephesians, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). He uses a present tense imperative verb that could more explicitly be translated, "Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit," thus implying that this is something that should repeatedly be happening to Christians. Such fullness of the Holy Spirit will result in renewed worship and thanksgiving (Eph. 5:19-20), and in renewed relationships to others, especially those in authority over us or those under our authority (Eph. 5:21-6:9). In addition, since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit who sanctifies us, such a filling will often result in increased sanctification. Furthermore, since the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us for Christian service and gives us spiritual gifts, such filling will often result in increased power for ministry and increased effectiveness and perhaps diversity in the use of spiritual gifts.

We see examples of repeated filling with the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. In Acts 2:4, the disciples and those with them were "all filled with the Holy



Spirit.” Later, when Peter was standing before the Sanhedrin, we read, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said to them ...” (Acts 4:8). But a little later, when Peter and the other apostles had returned to the church to tell what had happened (Acts 4:23) they joined together in prayer. After they had prayed they were again filled with the Holy Spirit, a sequence of events that Luke makes clear: “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31). Even though Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) and had later been filled with the Holy Spirit before speaking to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8), he was once again filled with the Holy Spirit after the group of Christians he was meeting with had prayed.

Therefore, it is appropriate to understand filling with the Holy Spirit not as a one-time event but as an event that can occur over and over again in a Christian’s life. It may involve a momentary empowering for a specific ministry (such as apparently happened in Acts 4:8; 7:55), but it may also refer to a long-term characteristic of a person’s life (see Acts 6:3; 11:24). In either case such filling can occur many times in a person’s life: even though

Stephen, as an early deacon (or apostolic assistant), was a man “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3, 5), when he was being stoned he apparently received a fresh new filling of the Holy Spirit in great power (Acts 7:55).

Someone might object that a person who is already “full” of the Holy Spirit cannot become more full—if a glass is full of water no more water can be put into it. But a water glass is a poor analogy for us as real people, for God is able to cause us to grow and to be able to contain much more of the Holy Spirit’s fullness and power. A better analogy might be a balloon, which can be “full” of air even though it has very little air in it. When more air is blown in, the balloon expands and in a sense it is “more full.” So it is with us: we can be filled with the Holy Spirit and at the same time be able to receive much more of the Holy Spirit as well. It was only Jesus himself to whom the Father gave the Spirit without measure (John 3:34).

The divisiveness that comes with the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” could easily be avoided by using any of the alternative terms mentioned in this section. People could be thankful for “a new fullness of the Holy Spirit” or “a new



empowering for ministry” or “a significant step in growth” in some aspect of another Christian’s life. There would be no separating into “we” and “they,” for we would recognize that we are all part of one body with no separate categories. In fact, many charismatics and even some traditional Pentecostals today are using the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” far less frequently, preferring to use other terms such as “being filled with the Holy Spirit” instead.

Moreover, many people who have had no single dramatic experience (such as what Pentecostals have called a baptism in the Holy Spirit) have nonetheless begun to experience new freedom and joy in worship (often with the advent of modern worship or praise songs in their churches), and to use a wider variety of spiritual gifts with effectiveness and edification for themselves and their churches (including gifts such as healing, prophecy, working of miracles, discernment of spirits, and the ability to exercise authority over demonic forces with prayer and a word of rebuke spoken directly to the evil spirits). Sometimes the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of interpretation have been used as well, but in other cases they have not. All of this is to say that the differences

between Pentecostals and charismatics on the one hand, and more traditional and mainstream evangelical Christians on the other hand, seem to me to be breaking down more and more, and there are fewer and fewer differences between them.

Someone may object that it is specifically this experience of praying for a baptism in the Holy Spirit that catapults people into a new level of power in ministry and effectiveness in use of spiritual gifts. Since this experience has been so helpful in the lives of millions of people, should we so quickly dismiss it? In response, it must be said that, if the terminology “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is changed for something more representative of New Testament teaching, there should be no objection at all to people coming into churches, and to encouraging people to prepare their hearts for spiritual renewal by sincere repentance and renewed commitment to Christ and by believing that the Holy Spirit can work much more powerfully in their lives. There is nothing wrong with teaching people to pray and to seek this greater infilling of the Holy Spirit, or to expect and ask the Lord for an outpouring of more spiritual gifts in their lives, for the benefit of the body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 12).

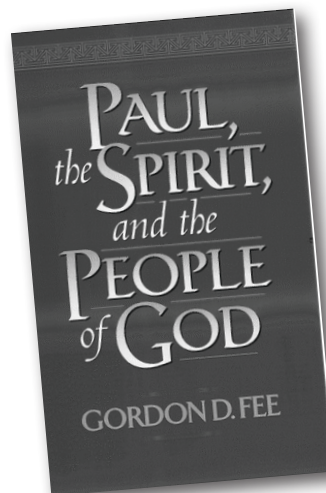


In fact, most evangelical Christians in every denomination genuinely long for greater power in ministry, greater joy in worship, and deeper fellowship with God. Many would also welcome increased understanding of spiritual gifts, and encouragement to grow in the use of them. If Pentecostal and charismatic Christians would be willing to teach on these things without the additional baggage of two-level Christianity that is implied by the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” they might find a new era of greatly increased effectiveness in bringing teaching on these other areas of the Christian life to evangelicals generally.

For Further Reading:

Paul, the Spirit and the People of God

- Gordon Fee



Notes:

[illegible]

Week 5

Acts 2:42-47



the book of **ACTS**
UNCONQUERED

Week 5

10/5/14

Text: Acts 2:42–47 (ESV)

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions

and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Context:

- Luke moves directly from the miraculous conversions of the church to the ordinary life of the church. The Spirit-filled experience of Pentecost bore fruit in the everyday experience of the church gathered.
- A thorough examination of Luke's description of the early church is given a bit further in this week's study via John Stott's commentary.



For Personal Reflection:

- Are there certain aspects of the life described in Acts 2:42-47 that are more appealing to you than others? Are you tempted to over-emphasize one aspect to the detriment of another?

- How would you characterize the commitment of those were part of the church in those days? Was “church” an hourly spectator sport on a Sunday morning?

- Count the number of times “all” is used in this short section. What does this tell us about Luke’s emphasis?

- In what ways does your Christian life reflect the “day by day”-ness of this first century church? Can you grow in any areas?



Group Discussion:

- Discuss the elements of the early church described in the Short Reading from John Stott (learning, love, worship and evangelism). How are we doing as a church?

- How is your group doing in those areas? How can you grow?

One Life:

The generous, intentional, loving life of community was a focal point of the early church. This week consider ways you might expose your friend, neighbor or co-worker to the fellowship of the church. Can you pray for opportunities to invite them? Do you need to sharpen your hospitality skills so that this kind

of caring relationship might be possible? Make it a goal to invite them into the community life of the church in a significant way. In order to stir interest, it may help to describe ways in which the group of Christians you are connected to have helped you or serve you in some way.



Short Reading¹:

What evidence did it give of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit? Luke tells us.

a. *It was a learning church*

The very first evidence Luke mentions of the Spirit's presence in the church is that *they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*. One might perhaps say that the Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day; its teachers were the apostles whom Jesus had appointed; and there were 3,000 pupils in the kindergarten! We note that those new converts were not enjoying a mystical experience which led them to despise their mind or disdain theology. Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are mutually incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Nor did those early disciples imagine that, because they had received the Spirit, he was the only teacher they needed and they could dispense with human teachers. On the contrary, they sat at the apostles' feet, hungry to receive instruction, and they

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 81–87.

persevered in it. Moreover, the teaching authority of the apostles, to which they submitted, was authenticated by miracles: *many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles* (43). The two references to the apostles, in verse 42 (their teaching) and in verse 43 (their miracles), can hardly be an accident.² Since the teaching of the apostles has come down to us in its definitive form in the New Testament, contemporary devotion to the apostles' teaching will mean submission to the authority of the New Testament. A Spirit-filled church is a New Testament church, in the sense that it studies and submits to New Testament instruction. The Spirit of God leads the people of God to submit to the Word of God.

b. *It was a loving church*

They devoted themselves... to the fellowship (koinōnia). Koinōnia (from koinos, “common”) bears witness to the common life of the church in two sense. First, it expresses what we share in together. This is God himself, for “our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ,”³ and there is “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Thus koinōnia is a

² Cf. 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1–4.

³ 1 Jn. 1:3.

⁴ 2 Cor. 13:14.



Trinitarian experience; it is our common share in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But secondly, *koinōnia* also expresses what we share out together, what we give as well as what we receive. *Koinōnia* is the word Paul used for the collection he was organizing among the Greek churches,⁵ and *koinonikos* is the Greek word for “generous.” It is to this that Luke is particularly referring here, because he goes on at once to describe the way in which these first Christians shared their possessions with one another: *all the believers were together and had everything in common* (*koina*). *Selling their possessions and goods* (probably meaning their real estate and their valuables respectively), *they gave to anyone as he had need* (44–45). These are disturbing verses. Do they mean that every Spirit-filled believer and community will follow their example literally?

It is important to note that even in Jerusalem the sharing of property and possessions was voluntary. According to verse 46, *they broke bread in their homes*. So evidently many still had homes; not all had sold them. It is also noteworthy that the tense of both verbs in verse 45 is imperfect, which indicates that the selling and the giving were occasional, in response to particular needs, not once

⁵ 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13.

and for all. Further, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, to which we shall come in Acts 5, was not greed or materialism but deceit; it was not that they had retained part of the proceeds of their sale, but that they had done so while pretending to give it all. Peter made this plain when he said to them: “Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal?” (5:4).

At the same time, although the selling and the sharing were and are voluntary, and every Christian has to make conscientious decisions before God in this matter, we are all called to generosity, especially towards the poor and needy. Already in the Old Testament there was a strong tradition of care for the poor, and the Israelites were to give a tenth of their produce to “the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow.”⁶ How can Spirit-filled believers possibly give less? The principle is stated twice in the Acts: *they gave to anyone as he had need* (45), and “there were no needy persons among them. . . the money. . . was distributed to anyone as he had need” (4:34–35). As John was to write later, if we have material possessions and see a brother or sister in need, but do not share what we have with him or her, how can we claim

⁶ Dt. 26:12.



that God's love dwells in us?⁷ Christian fellowship is Christian caring, and Christian caring is Christian sharing. Chrysostom gave a beautiful description of it: "This was an angelic commonwealth, not to call anything of theirs their own. Forthwith the root of evils was cut out. . . None reproached, none envied, none grudged; no pride, no contempt was there. . . The poor man knew no shame, the rich no haughtiness."⁸ So we must not evade the challenge of these verses. That we have hundreds of thousands of destitute brothers and sisters is a standing rebuke to us who are more affluent. It is part of the responsibility of Spirit-filled believers to alleviate need and abolish destitution in the new community of Jesus.

c. It was a worshipping church

They devoted themselves. . . to the breaking of bread and to prayer (42). That is, their fellowship was expressed not only in caring for each other, but in corporate worship too. Moreover, the definite article in both expressions (literally, "the breaking of the bread and the prayers") suggests a reference to the Lord's Supper on the one hand (although

⁷ 1 Jn. 3:17.

⁸ Chrysostom, Homily VII, p. 47.

almost certainly at that early stage as part of a larger meal) and prayer services or meetings (rather than Private prayer) on the other. There are two aspects of the early church's worship which exemplify its balance.

First, it was both formal and informal, for it took place both *in the temple courts and in their homes* (46), which is an interesting combination. It is perhaps surprising that they continued for a while in the temple, but they did. They did not immediately abandon what might be called the institutional church. I do not believe they still participated in the sacrifices of the temple, for already they had begun to grasp that these had been fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ, but they do seem to have attended the prayer services of the temple (cf. 3:1), unless, as has been suggested, they went up to the temple to preach, rather than to pray. At the same time, they supplemented the temple services with more informal and spontaneous meetings (including the breaking of bread) in their homes. Perhaps we, who get understandably impatient with the inherited structures of the church, can learn a lesson from them. For myself, I believe that the Holy Spirit's way with the institutional church, which we long to see reformed according to the gospel,



is more the way of patient reform than of impatient rejection. And certainly it is always healthy when the more formal and dignified services of the local church are complemented with the informality and exuberance of home meetings. There is no need to polarize between the structured and the unstructured, the traditional and the spontaneous. The church needs both.

The second example of the balance of the early church's worship is that it was both joyful and reverent. There can be no doubt of their joy, for they are described as having *glad and sincere hearts* (46), which literally means "in exultation [agalliasis] and sincerity of heart." The NEB⁹ unites the two words by translating "with unaffected joy." Since God had sent his son into the world, and had now sent them his Spirit, they had plenty of reason to be joyful. Besides, "the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy,"¹⁰ and sometimes a more uninhibited joy than is customary (or even acceptable) within the staid traditions of the historic churches. Yet every worship service should be a joyful celebration of the mighty acts of God through Jesus Christ. It is right in public worship to be

9 NEB The New English Bible (NT 1961, 2nd edition 1970; OT 1970).

10 Gal. 5:22.

dignified; it is unforgivable to be dull. At the same time, their joy was never irreverent. If joy in God is an authentic work of the Spirit, so is the fear of God. *Everyone was filled with awe* (43), which seems to include the Christians as well as the non-Christians. God had visited their city. He was in their midst, and they knew it. They bowed down before him in humility and wonder. It is a mistake, therefore, to imagine that in public worship reverence and rejoicing are mutually exclusive. The combination of joy and awe, as of formality and informality, is a healthy balance in worship.

d. *It was an evangelistic church*

So far we have considered the study, the fellowship and the worship of the Jerusalem church, for it is to these three things that Luke says the first believers *devoted themselves*. Yet these are aspects of the interior life of the church; they tell us nothing about its compassionate outreach to the world. Tens of thousands of sermons have been preached on Acts 2:42, which well illustrates the danger of isolating a text from its context. On its own, verse 42 presents a very lopsided picture of the church's life. Verse 47b needs to be added: *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*



Those first Jerusalem Christians were not so preoccupied with learning, sharing and worshiping, that they forgot about witnessing. For the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church. As Harry Boer expressed it in his challenging book *Pentecost and Missions*,¹¹ the Acts “is governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit. . . Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness, and continually churches rise out of the witness. The church is a missionary church.”¹²

From these earliest believers in Jerusalem, we can learn three vital lessons about local church evangelism. First, the Lord himself (that is, Jesus) did it: *the Lord added to their number*. Doubtless he did it through the preaching of the apostles, the witness of church members, the impressive love of their common life, and their example as they were praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people (47a). Yet he did it. For he is the head of the church. He alone has the prerogative to admit people into its membership and to bestow salvation from his

throne. This is a much needed emphasis, for many people talk about evangelism today with reprehensible self-confidence and even triumphalism, as if they think the evangelization of the world will be the ultimate triumph of human technology. We should harness to the evangelistic task all the technology God has given us, but only in humble dependence on him as the principal evangelist.

Secondly, what Jesus did was two things together: he *added to their number* . . . *those who were being saved* (the present participle *sōzomenous* either being timeless or emphasizing that salvation is a progressive experience culminating in final glorification). He did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning), nor did he save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). Salvation and church membership belonged together; they still do. Thirdly, the Lord added people *daily*. The verb is an imperfect (‘kept adding’), and the adverb (‘daily’) puts the matter beyond question. The early church’s evangelism was not an occasional or sporadic activity. They did not organize quinquennial or decennial missions (missions are fine so long as they are only episodes in an ongoing programme). No, just as their

¹¹ *Pentecost and Missions* by Harry Boer (Lutterworth, 1961).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 161–162.



worship was daily (46a), so was their witness. Praise and proclamation were both the natural overflow of hearts full of the Holy Spirit. And as their outreach was continuous, so continuously converts were being added. We need to recover this expectation of steady and uninterrupted church growth.

Looking back over these marks of the first Spirit-filled community, it is evident that they all concerned the church's relationships. First, they were related to the apostles (in submission). They were eager to receive the apostles' instruction. A Spirit-filled church is an apostolic church, a New Testament church, anxious to believe and obey what Jesus and his apostles taught. Secondly, they were related to each other (in love). They persevered in the fellowship, supporting each other and relieving the needs of the poor. A Spirit-filled church is a loving, caring, sharing church. Thirdly, they were related to God (in worship). They worshiped him in the temple and in the home, in the Lord's Supper and in the prayers, with joy and with reverence. A Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church. Fourthly, they were related to the world (in outreach). They were engaged in continuous evangelism. No self-centered, self-contained church (absorbed

in its own parochial affairs) can claim to be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit. So a Spirit-filled church is a missionary church.

There is no need for us to wait, as the hundred and twenty had to wait, for the Spirit to come. For the Holy Spirit did come on the Day of Pentecost, and has never left his church. Our responsibility is to humble ourselves before his sovereign authority, to determine not to quench him, but to allow him his freedom. For then our churches will again manifest those marks of the Spirit's presence, which many young people are specially looking for, namely biblical teaching, loving fellowship, living worship, and an ongoing, outgoing evangelism.

Notes:

[illegible]

Week 6

Acts 3:1-26



the book of **ACTS**
UNCONQUERED

Week 6

10/12/14

Text: Acts 3:1–26 (ESV)

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. **2** And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. **3** Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. **4** And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” **5** And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. **6** But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” **7** And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. **8** And leaping up he stood and began

to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. **9** And all the people saw him walking and praising God, **10** and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. **12** And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? **13** The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you



delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy

prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ 24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ 26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”



Context:

- The beginning of chapter 3 refocuses on the ministry of Peter and John, significant leaders in the early church. Descriptions of the church gathered are not in conflict with the presence of the key leadership. Both elements (the church as a whole and gifted leaders) are means by which God establishes His kingdom on the earth.
 - Peter and John are ministering and praying in the temple, which fits the description of the church from the end of Acts 2. They most likely continue this practice because of the opportunities it affords them to testify concerning Jesus.
 - There is an ongoing ministry of the miraculous through the ministry of the apostles. Peter and John heal the lame man but then immediately connect their healing to the power of Jesus.
 - Everything the apostles did was done in light of the gospel. Lame man wants alms... heal in the name of Jesus. The people saw the miracle... Peter preaches about Jesus.
- Peter places the emphasis on this powerful episode outside of himself (v. 12). He does not claim power. He points to Jesus (v. 6, 16) and the faith of the man (v. 16).
 - The theme of Peter's preaching is once again repentance (3:19). This is a word which means a change of mind with feelings of remorse. A turning around. It is the most common word for conversion.
 - We once again see preaching which appeals very directly to the OT. Peter references the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and our fathers. Later he quotes Moses. This serves a two-fold purpose. One, it connects the person of Jesus to the prophecies of the OT; the Word of God is powerful and unified. Second, it is a bridge of understanding for the God-fearing Jews in the temple; they understood the OT and respected it.



For Personal Reflection:

- Which is the greater miracle: the lame man walking, or sins being blotted out? Which do you tend to be more impressed by?

- Take some time to read 1 John 1:7-9. I know you are familiar with it. Really read it. Meditate on the weight of this cleansing promise. Do you see the miracle? Confess. Enact the miracle again and again!

- What word does Peter use in Acts 3 verse 15 to describe who he is and what he does? Where have we seen this word before? Do you identify with this?

- How does the healing of the lame man substantiate Peter's claims about what God is doing in Jesus from 3:21?



Group Discussion:

- Has your group been in the practice of praying for healing? Do you feel comfortable asking for help in this area?
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- Discuss ways your group could make intentional prayer for healing a more regular part of life together.
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One Life:

There are very few people who will object to prayer. They may argue concerning the origins of life or the deity of Christ or the nature of miracles but will often be quite agreeable on the general concept of prayer. Have you offered to pray? Simply acknowledge that you care for them and would like to include them in times you spend in prayer. Ask specific questions about what is burdening them and then

listen well. Pray for their worries and sickness and dreams and family. Commit to praying for these areas and maybe even follow-up with a note of encouragement when you have prayed. At first, it may be more comfortable to pray privately at a different time. As the relationship progresses you may be able to pray with the person in person.



Short Reading¹:

How Then Should We Pray for Healing?
How then should we pray regarding physical illness? Certainly it is right to ask God for healing, for Jesus tells us to pray, “Deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13), and the apostle John writes to Gaius, “I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health” (3 John 2). Moreover, Jesus frequently healed all who were brought to him, and he never sent people away, telling them it would be good for them to remain ill for a longer time! In addition to this, whenever we take any kind of medicine or seek any medical help for an illness, by those actions we admit that we think it to be God’s will that we seek to be well. If we thought that God wanted us to continue in our illness, we would never seek medical means for healing! So when we pray it seems right that our first assumption, unless we have specific reason to think otherwise, should be that God would be pleased to heal the person we are praying for—as far as we can tell from Scripture, this is God’s revealed will.

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 1066–1069.

Ken Blue has a helpful observation here. He argues that if we want to understand God’s attitude toward physical healing we should look at Jesus’ life and ministry. Blue says, “If Jesus truly reveals the character of God to us, then we may cease speculating about and arguing over God’s will in sickness and healing. Jesus healed people because he loved them. Very simply, he had compassion for them; he was on their side; he wanted to solve their problems.” This is a strong argument, especially when coupled with the realization that Jesus came to inaugurate the presence of the kingdom of God among us and to show us what the kingdom of God would be like.

How then should we pray? Certainly it is right to ask God for healing, and we should go to him with the simple request that he give physical healing in time of need. James warns us that simple unbelief can lead to prayerlessness and failure to receive answers from God: “You do not have, because you do not ask” (James 4:2). But when we pray for healing we should remember that we must pray for God to be glorified in the situation, whether he chooses to heal or not. And we also ought to pray out of the same compassion of heart that Jesus felt for those whom he healed. When we pray this way, God will



sometimes—and perhaps often—grant answers to our prayers.

Someone may object at this point that, from a pastoral standpoint, much harm is done when people are encouraged to believe that a miracle of healing will occur and then nothing happens—disappointment with the church and anger at God may result. Those who pray for people to be healed today need to hear this objection and use wisdom in what they tell people who are ill.

But we also need to realize that there is more than one kind of mistake to make: (1) Not praying for healing at all is not a correct solution, for it involves disobedience to James 5. (2) Telling people that God seldom heals today and that they should expect nothing to happen is not a correct solution either, for it does not provide an atmosphere conducive to faith and is inconsistent with the pattern we see in the ministry of Jesus and the early church in the New Testament. (3) Telling people that God always heals today if we have enough faith is a cruel teaching not supported by Scripture (see section 6 below).

The pastorally wise solution, it seems, lies between (2) and (3) above. We can tell

people that God frequently heals today (if we believe that is true), and that it is very possible that they will be healed, but that we are still living in an age when the kingdom of God is “already” here but “not yet” fully here. Therefore Christians in this life will experience healing (and many other answers to prayer), but they will also experience continuing illness and eventual death. In each individual case it is God’s sovereign wisdom that decides the outcome, and our role is simply to ask him and wait for him to answer (whether “yes” or “no” or “keep praying and wait”).

Those with “gifts of healings” (a literal translation of the plurals in 1 Cor. 12:9, 28) will be those people who find that their prayers for healing are answered more frequently and more thoroughly than others. When that becomes evident, a church would be wise to encourage them in this ministry and give them more opportunities to pray for others who are ill. We should also realize that gifts of healing could include ministry not only in terms of physical healing, but also in terms of emotional healing. And it may at times include the ability to set people free from demonic attack, for this is also called “healing” sometimes in Scripture (see Luke 6:18; Acts 10:38).



Perhaps the gifts of being able to pray effectively in different kinds of situations and for different kinds of needs are what Paul referred to when he used the plural expression, “gifts of healings.”

But What If God Does Not Heal? Nonetheless, we must realize that not all prayers for healing will be answered in this age. Sometimes God will not grant the special “faith” (James 5:15) that healing will occur, and at times God will choose not to heal, because of his own sovereign purposes. In these cases we must remember that Romans 8:28 is still true: though we experience the “sufferings of this present time,” and though we “groan inwardly as we wait for ... the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:18, 23), nonetheless, “we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). This includes working in our circumstances of suffering and illness as well.

Whatever Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was (and centuries of work by Bible-believing interpreters have failed to turn up a definitive answer), Paul realized that God allowed it to remain with him “to keep me from being too elated” (2 Cor. 12:7), that is, to keep Paul humble before the

Lord. So the Lord told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). There are indications in the early church that even in the presence of the apostles not all people were healed. Paul recognized that “our outer nature is wasting away” (2 Cor. 4:16), and sometimes disease and illness will not be healed. When Epaphroditus came to visit Paul, he had an illness that brought him “near to death” (Phil. 2:27). Paul indicates in the narrative of Philippians 2 that it appeared as though Epaphroditus were going to die—that God did not heal him immediately when he became ill. But eventually God did heal (Phil. 2:27) in answer to prayer. Paul told Timothy that he should drink a little wine “for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Tim. 5:23). He said, “Trophimus I left ill at Miletus” (2 Tim. 4:20). And both Peter (1 Peter 1:6–7; 4:19) and James (James 1:2–4) have words of encouragement and counsel for those who are suffering trials of various kinds:

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4)



When God chooses not to heal, even though we ask him for it, then it is right that we “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:18) and realize that God can use sickness to draw us closer to himself and to increase in us obedience to his will. So the psalmist can say, “It is good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn your statutes” (Ps. 119:71), and, “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I keep your word” (Ps. 119:67).

Therefore God can bring increased sanctification to us through illness and

suffering—just as he can bring sanctification and growth in faith through miraculous healing. But the emphasis of the New Testament, both in Jesus’ ministry and in the ministry of the disciples in Acts, seems to be one that encourages us in most cases eagerly and earnestly to seek God for healing, and then to continue to trust him to bring good out of the situation, whether he grants the physical healing or not. The point is that in everything God should receive glory and our joy and trust in him should increase.



Notes:

[illegible]



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