

## Do We Look Like the Early Church?

### ❖ Importance of the Book of Acts

- Written to give a faithful representation of how the early church functioned.
- Consequently, it shows us what we should look like as believers of Jesus.

### ❖ People love to get lost in a good story

- **We spend a lot of time and money reading books or watching TV**
  - All in an effort to get into another world, usually with fake people and unreal places
- **We do this because deep down, I think...**
  - We believe we are meant for something greater than this world...
  - So we attempt to escape to a world of adventure or mystery or drama or love
- **Truth be told, we are made to escape this world,**
  - It is fallen, and not our home...
- **Yet, we can still be the story...**
  - Let's allow the book of Acts to continue even today in our lives...
  - Let's add to the Acts of the apostles with our Acts for Jesus...

### ❖ Acts is an Action Book...

- Compare Yourself – Challenge Yourself – Recapture the Book of Acts Today

### ❖ 1) The Story Begins: Men Watching Jesus, the King, Ascend into Heaven

- **Notice:** The story of the book of Acts, is not so much about the People
  - It is About Jesus, It is about the God of the people.
  - Everything that is done, is done in His name.
- **They are given a Mission...**
  - Their Mission: Wait and then Be Witnesses
- **Acts 1:5,8<sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ...<sup>8</sup> 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."**
  - They will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them
    - **Application for us Today: This same power is available to the believer that is dwelt by the Holy Spirit...**
      - ◆ **If you do not believe me... look**
      - ◆ **Romans 8:11<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.**
        - We have the same Spirit giving us life...
  - **Also, You begin to see God's plan develop**
    - All people are a part of His plan... All peoples...

### ❖ 2) The Holy Spirit Comes (Everything Changes)

- **Acts 2:3-4<sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**
  - God is displaying His Great Power and Mercy by sending His Spirit
  - He empowers the followers of Jesus
- **Purpose of the coming of the Spirit: To spread the story of Jesus**
  - Pentecost was a celebration of the Harvest, and there was a great harvest of souls that day
- **Attention: Until we realize this is still our mission today, we will wallow in spiritual mediocrity...**

- Hear what the Spirit has to say about this to you...

### ❖ 3) The First Great Sermon by A Christian

- Acts 2:36,37 <sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” <sup>37</sup> 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?”
- **Peter is sharing the story of Jesus to a large and diverse crowd**
  - It is just as relevant for us even today...
- **A) For the Spirit filled believer here today...**
  - You get a refresher of the message you believed
  - You get a reason to rejoice,
  - A Reminder to give this story to others
- **B) For the Person who hasn't yet followed Jesus**
  - You get a message... of Conviction and Hope
    - **Conviction:** Peter reminds the crowd of their sin in crucifying Jesus
    - 2:36... this Jesus whom you crucified...
  - **Let us remember... we are responsible for his crucifixion as well**
    - It is our sins the placed Jesus on the cross
    - We are equally culpable
- **Peter Tells them:**
  - Jesus came, Jesus died, Jesus was resurrected, and Jesus has been exalted...
    - Their reaction: 2:37 ...they were cut to the heart...
    - Their Response was to... as Peter says... 2:38 “repent and be baptized everyone of you”
    - A Promise of **Hope:** Acts 2:38 “... for the forgiveness of your sins...”
- **Question:** Don't You want your sins forgiving you? Don't you want this for others?
  - Has this ever happened for you? Have you ever helped someone else discover this?
- **Prayer:** Oh God, our prayer is that you give us a spirit of appreciation and boldness to share this good news...
- **Notice: What made the Story so Believable:**
  - These guys were personal eye witnesses...
    - Acts 2:32 <sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.
  - We too are witness of this story handed down to us through God's preserved Word
    - As well as the Holy Spirit confirming the truth of this message in our hearts and minds

### ❖ 4) Something Amazing Happens (We should strive to mimic this...)

- Acts 2:42 <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- If you continue to read... you see they were extremely generous with their belongings...
- **Let Me encourage you today**
  - **Devote Yourself to:**
    - 1) The apostle's teachings (Bible) 2) fellowship, 3) breaking of bread, 4) Prayers
      - ◆ **@ Hope we are striving to make this possible and within reason for all of you**
        - Having a church service once a week...
        - Bible Study at 9:15
        - Prayer at 10:15 an multiple other times
        - Wednesday night opportunity to serve and fellowship and learn
  - **Very reasonable in what we ask of our people**
    - If you can not find the time to participate...

◆ Something is wrong with your situation... it needs to change...

▪ **Christians have a long history of leaving jobs, families and lands to follow Jesus**

- They can do this because they are filled with faith...
- Faith in a God who is king over heaven and earth...
- **A God who can provide all they need...**

◆ So giving up a hobby or extra work hours is nothing when serving God.

➤ **Devote Yourself!**

- Why is this so important? Because Devotion leads to church growth
- **Acts 2:47 And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**

❖ **5) Peter and John Display the Power of the Spirit**

➤ They heal a lame begger

- **Acts 3:4-6 <sup>4</sup> And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." <sup>5</sup> And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> 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!"**

▪ God displays His power over the body by healing this man

▪ He uses it as another opportunity to share the story of Jesus w/ many who had not yet believed

- God continues to draw the lost to Him... Merciful

➤ **Again: We see another call to Repent**

- **Acts 3:19a <sup>19</sup> Repent therefore, and turn back,**

➤ **Also... A promise of Hope**

- **Acts 3:19b that your sins may be blotted out,**

➤ **Reminder of God's Kindness**

- **Acts 3:26 <sup>26</sup> God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."**

❖ **6) Persecution Begins**

➤ **Very quickly in the book of Acts the idea of God placing His Children on easy street is put to rest...**

- Peter and John are arrested, questioned and warned...

➤ **An opportunity to clear things up arises:**

- **Acts 4:12 <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."**

▪ This Question is just as relevant today

- We can not be on the fence about this
- There is no other religion, no other philosophy, no other way a person can have their sins removed

▪ It is also true of those that claim the name of Jesus, yet their interpretation of Him

- Is different from what we see in the scriptures

▪ No Other Name

- This is met with opposition today...
- Met with the thought of exclusivity... or how dare you say that
- How could you know...

▪ Our Response... Should be the same as the disciples in those early days...

- **Acts 4:20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."**

➤ **Prayer: Oh God that we would be unable to hold back from telling the story of your Son**

❖ **7) The Church Sees Great Generosity and Greed**

- **This is a valuable lesson for us today**
  - I think it speaks greatly to you and me today...
- **These “new” Christians were extremely generous.**
  - They came to know Jesus and immediately became generous givers...
  - This is a great indictment against our current age of givers...
  - **Statistics show that so called Christians**
    - Give only 2.5% of their income...
      - ◆ No where even close to floor of 10% which is where are giving should begin...
      - ◆ If Christians in America were to just tithe 10%...
      - ◆ There would be 1.65 billion more dollars for the church
      - ◆ to use to help in bringing people to Jesus
- **Acts 4:32,34<sup>32</sup> Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common...<sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold**
  - We certainly do not look like that...
- **This is highlighted by the stories of two men**
  - Barnabas and Ananais...
    - Barnabas sold a field and gave all the proceeds to the apostles to use in the church
    - Ananais sold a field and gave half of the proceeds to the church...
      - ◆ Which would have been ok... but he said that was all of the proceeds from the field...
- **Is this not how the church today functions...**
  - We still see this...
  - Many give according to how God blesses them financially...
  - Others give, but act as if their giving is according to how God has blessed them financially
    - Usually they are far from it...
- **Prayer: Oh God, please increase our generosity... help us see the you will provide for all our needs...**
  - Please do not allow us to put holding on to a few extra bucks before being obedient to you
- **Notice: The Holy Spirit was aware of everything that happened...**
  - Ananais thought he could skirt by with no one knowing, and his reputation would soar...
  - He was wrong... and he paid for it with his life
  - **Barnabas on the other hand, goes on to do great things for God**
    - He trusted God’s provision in his life, knowing God would supply all his needs...
    - And his needs would surround doing good things for God...
    - **His good friend Paul would later write to the Corinthians...**
      - ◆ **2 Corinthians 9:8 “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times you may abound in every good work**
        - Barnabas abounded in good works...
- **8)The Church’s First Martyr**
  - **In Chapter 6 we meet Stephen, one of 7 men chosen to serve widows who needed food/money**
    - He was chosen to do this so the apostles would be freed up to spend more time in Word/Prayer
    - He was a man full of the Spirit and Wisdom, a good reputation and filled with grace and power
  - **Stephen has one problem: He loved Jesus too much**
    - He was so excited about the story of Jesus, He made others a bit uncomfortable
    - He was telling everybody about Jesus...
    - In the process, a bunch of Jewish priests were getting saved
  - **So, some leaders decided to make up some lies about Stephen...**

- This only ends up working in God's favor...
- Stephen is surrounded by a lot of leaders asking him questions
- **Stephen is now given the opportunity to proclaim the story of Jesus to all of them...**
  - A ready made audience...
  - So He does...
  - But things come to a head in his message when he says.
    - Acts 7:51-52 <sup>51</sup> "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. <sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,
- **The Result of his sermon: They are enraged and stone him as they are drunk with hatred...**
  - A great man of God is killed and the church mourns...
    - Acts 8:2 <sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.
- **Do Not Fear: God is not surprised by this... it actually works in His plan...**
  - Remember: God is Sovereign... even in the death of His Saints...

## ❖ 9) Persecution is Amplified by Saul

- Saul consented to the death of Stephen... meaning he cheered it on...
- The persecution begins to spread the gospel to other cities and villages
- **Jesus proclaimed to the disciples in Acts 1:8**
  - You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... but also Samaria and Judea and the whole world
  - Acts 8:1 "And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,
- **We are introduced then to a neat guy, one of Stephen's fellow servants and friend**
  - **Phillip**... He goes to Samaria (A place many Jewish people hated)
  - He goes to the undesirables... And He causes much joy in the city of Samaria
  - He was preaching the story of Jesus and performing miracles that validated his message
- **We are then introduced to a Conundrum...: an enigma or a problem...**
  - Something that puzzles us
- **A magician named Simon believes and is baptized...**
  - Yet we will notice that this guy was in love with himself and his own glory... not God's
  - Many others believe: And they are baptized...
    - Eventually we see the Holy Spirit is given to many Samaritans...
- **Simon notices this power, and wants to buy the ability to give the Spirit to others...**
  - We see his true self... He had come to Christ for Himself and the power he would have...
  - He is the first clear example of a false convert in Acts...
    - Peter says to him: Acts 8:20-23 <sup>0</sup> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."
- **Application:**
  - Be careful of your motives in coming to Jesus...
  - The difference b/w Simon and the others who believed is shown in the text...
  - People: 8:12 they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ,
  - Simon 8:13 ... And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

## ❖ 10) God's Leading in Evangelism

- **God sends Philip from Samaria to a road in the desert...**
  - Here we see how detailed God's great plan of reaching the nations actually is...
- **An Ethiopian is passing by reading a text from the book of Isaiah...**
  - Philip hears him and asks if he understands... which he does not...
  - So Philip begins from there and preaches the story of Jesus to this guy from Ethiopia
  - A God ordained meeting...
- **Notice:** There are no accidents in this life... no surprise meetings...
- **Prayer:** god, that we will notice your planned meetings. Let us always be prepared and ready
- **Question:** Why was Philip usable by God? Why was he prepared? To be led by the Spirit?
  - Because we know what kind of man he was... Devoted to the Word, Prayer and obedience
  - When these are right in our lives, We will recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit

## ❖ 11) God's Great Display of Sovereign Patience

- After persecuting the church and hating Jesus with passion
- Saul comes face to face with Jesus
- **In an overwhelming display of Irresistible Grace: Saul is converted**
  - Acts 9:4-6 <sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."
- **Jesus had a plan for Saul**
  - He allowed him time to persecute the church
  - **Remember:** There are no accidents with God... God could have stopped Paul at any time
    - Stephen could have been spared.
- **God knew what He was doing**
  - Acts 9:15-16 <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."
- **Immediately Saul goes from Persecutor of the Jesus to Preacher of Jesus**
  - Now He becomes the hunted one...
- **Remember:** Coming to Jesus has dramatic consequences in a person's life
- **Prayer:** Let us live out our Christianity w/same devotion as Paul!

## ❖ 12) The Story of Jesus Spreads to Our People

- The Gentiles are Saved
- **Learn this: God intends to use people o reach people...**
  - God gives Peter a vision, He gives Cornelius a vision
  - God intended for Peter to tell Cornelius and his household the story of Jesus
  - **Notice:** He did the same thing w/ Paul
    - Jesus appears to him... but it was through Ananais that Saul receives his sight
    - And is filled with the Spirit and Baptized
- **Cornelius was a man that drew nears to God, and God noticed**
  - Peter was a man ready to be used by God ... **Question:** Which one are you?
- **Peter Shares the Good News of Jesus: Which is a central theme in the Book of Acts**
  - Acts 10:42-42 <sup>42</sup> And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."
  - They were immediately filled with the Spirit and baptized...
  - This is the beginning for us... this is where our story begane

- **Interestingly: In all of this, there were many near sighted church leaders.**
  - They questioned the gospel going to other types of people
  - They had forgotten Jesus command for His story to go to all people...
  - Peter sets them straight... He remembers the word of the Lord
    - Acts 11:16 <sup>16</sup> **And I remembered the word of the Lord,**
    - When we remember God's Word, He sets our paths straight
- **Prayer: Let is not forget your word and fail to be obedient to your commands**

### ❖ 13) Finally There are Christians

- **Acts 11:26b And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.**
- **The persecution had spread the gospel to a place called Antioch**
  - **God uses some unnamed men to tell people in this region about Jesus**
    - 1) Then many believed and turned to the Lord Acts 11:21
    - 2) They began to grow in the Lord... Barnabas comes along to teach them
    - 3) As they grow He brings Saul in to help disciple them
    - 4) These men begin to multiply
      - ◆ As they were taught, the told others... **A natural progression of Faith in Christ**
- **We See 1 Amazingly Big Thing... Which can be applied to the Entire Book... Every Event...**
  - When barnabas comes to Antioch... He noticed something...
  - **Acts 11:23 <sup>23</sup> When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad**
  - The Grace of God was evident...
- **Then in an interesting twist... People began to mock them by calling them Christians**
  - Question: Would people be able to look on us and mock us because we closely resembled Jesus?

### ❖ 14) The Greatness of God in Persecution

- **James is killed, Peter imprisoned, and Herod looks like He is on charge**
  - The chapter seems like it is mainly about Peter and Herod...**But the story is about God**
- **God will be glorified**
  - Herod thinks he is winning by killing James... He sees it pleases many Jews...
  - He likes being liked, so he imprisons Peter as well... plans to kill him
- **Peter is in a no win situation it seems...**
  - In jail and chained to soldiers on either side
  - The outlook is bleak... But God has a plan
- **God Displays His power by freeing Peter while no one noticed**
- **Herod's Reaction is Anger...**
  - He leaves town and tries to makes himself into something special...
  - To look like a great King as he addresses a huge crowd and gives a speech...
  - He allows the people to call him a God... to say he had the voice of a god
- **God is not one who will share His glory...**
  - So God strikes him down for his pompous behavior
  - Herod dies in a terrible way being eaten on the inside by worms
- **Lesson for us: When you go against God, you will ALWAYS lose**
  - **We should make it our life's work to give God the glory in all things...**
    - **Not to be like Herod or King Nebuchadnezzar**
- **Men try to frustrate God's plans... but what do we see?**
  - God's plan continues: **Acts 12:24 "But the word of God increased and multiplied.**

- ❖ **Invitation: God is still working today... His perfect plan continues... will you join Him?**