

Acts: Of The Spirit ... The Church And You & Me

Over the next several months, we will be embarking on a spiritual journey through the Book Of Acts. As we are led through the growth of the church, we will be winding down several parallel paths along the way. A general outline, given below, will help flesh out our journey:

ACTS 1:1 - 8:1

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

1:1 - 1:14	Introduction
1:15 - 26	A new apostle is chosen
2:1-13	The feast of Pentecost
2:14-47	Peter's first sermon
3:1 - 4:31	Healing of a lame man
4:32 - 5:11	Ananias and Sapphira
5:12-42	The Apostles before the council
6	The first deacons appointed
7:1 - 8:1	Stephen's defense and stoning

ACTS 8:1 - 11:18

PERSECUTION : THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO JUDEA AND SAMARIA

8:1 - 25	The Samaritans respond to the Gospel
8:26-40	Philip and the Ethiopian Treasurer
9:1-31	Saul is converted to Christianity
9:32-43	Peter at Lydda and Joppa
10	Peter and Cornelius
11:1-18	The Apostles approve Peter's actions

ACTS 11:19 - 16:6

THE GOSPEL ADVANCES INTO SYRIA AND TURKEY

11:19-30	The first Gentile Church at Antioch
12	James is killed, Peter imprisoned
<i>Further Study: Prayer in the life of a believer</i>	
13, 14	The First Missionary Journey: Paul and Barnabas - Cyprus, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe
<i>Further Study: Fasting in the life of a believer</i>	
15:1-35	The Council at Jerusalem

ACTS 16:6 - 19:41

PAUL TAKES THE GOSPEL TO EUROPE

15:36 - 19:41	The Second Missionary Journey: Paul and Silas - Philippi, Thyatira, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus
<i>Further Study: What are the Power Gifts Of The Spirit and are they still in use today? What is spiritual warfare?</i>	

ACTS 20 - 28

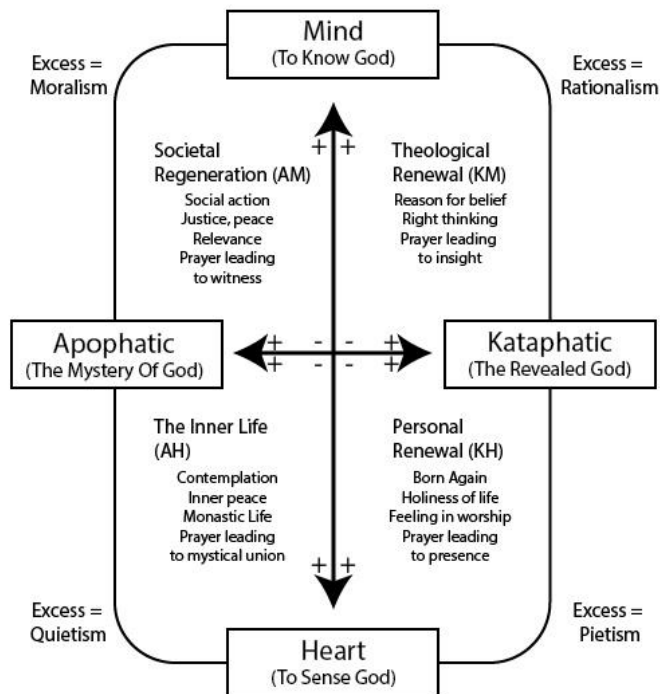
PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME

20: 1-16	Paul sets out for Jerusalem
20:17 - 21:14	Paul speaks with the Ephesian Elders
21:15 - 23:35	Paul is arrested in Jerusalem
24	The defense before Felix
25:1-12	The defense before Festus
25:13 - 26:32	The defense before Agrippa
27, 28	Paul's boat trip, shipwreck, arrival at Rome
<i>Further Study: Are angels still flying around today?</i>	

Introduction:

- this book was written to cover about 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- its author was Luke (based on the comparison between the open verses of this book and the Gospel. He was the only non-Jew to write Scripture and he was an eye-witness to many of the events he recorded
- this work is a sequel to the book of Luke and together, they comprise the largest portion of the New Testament
- We must be careful to interpret this material not as normative instruction on HOW the church should operate but as an example of what the Spirit can do through a group of "sold out" people.
- Some of the overarching themes in this book include:
 - a) Evangelism is everyone's business, not just a select few.
 - b) The content that we share is critically important. We will see that the message is rooted in Scripture.
 - c) The timeless, unchanging message must always be contextualized. Paul will show us this.
 - d) Paul will operate within the context of the law as much as possible, but will always bow to the Lord's law as supreme. We use what we have to promote and live our faith and suffer the slings and arrows of this world system when we cannot.
 - e) There will ALWAYS be opposition between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of our God.
 - f) The Holy Spirit is the source of power in this Christian walk.
 - g) Prayer, God's sovereignty, suffering

Types Of Christian Spirituality



A Change ... A Beginning ... And The Power To Do It

Acts 1: 1-2 This book begins almost identically to Luke, and we attribute authorship of the book to Luke for this reason. We do not know who Theophilus is, other than a probable well-to-do Roman friend. Luke, a historian attempts to set the record straight concerning the birth of the church.

Acts 1:3 Jesus needed to turn a group of fishermen, cowering from the Roman and Jewish authorities, into a united group of “love warriors” that would be so radically convinced of His truth, that they would eventually give their lives for it.

- this is, in essence, what the Lord did for the Jews as they left Egypt
- Jesus appears to the Apostles, then to many (1 Corinth. 15:1-8). Would you die for a lie?
- note that Luke makes reference to objective truth ; Is it possible for us to present Truth as absolute to a culture of relativism? Do ads today attempt to persuade us to buy a product because of facts or because the product somehow makes us feel good? What is wrong with “feel good” theology?
- There is a note to remember here ... we cannot do ministry without the Holy Spirit.
- Note further, that the goal of Christian teaching is to CONVERT! This flies in the face of post-modernism.

1:4-7 Note that often we want the Lord to do what we want ... but His focus is often to show us where there needs to be change in our hearts and our plans and our directions!

- note at least three errors in the apostles question:
 - A) **restore** ... a political kingdom was coming
 - B) **Israel** ... an Israelite kingdom was coming; no place for spiritual pride or prejudice
 - C) **at this time** ... it was coming now!
 - there is no value in setting dates

1:8-10 Christ’s ascension ... and the command to “occupy until He returns!”

- Does what happens in the church today REALLY require the Spirit of God’s power?

Why did Jesus ascend this time?

- in the past, He simply appeared and disappeared.
- now, two angels instruct the apostles
 - 1) This signifies that there is to be a “finish” to the general appearances of Christ to the Apostles
 - they are now on their own to continue the story
 - it would be the earth that would be their preoccupation, not the sky
 - clouds often were thought of as representing Divine Glory (Cloud Riders)
 - 2) Staring into the sky will not bring Him back. Be about your Father’s business
 - Christ will return in His time, in His power, in the same way
 - men of Galilee ... seemed to imply that these were men of little renown - but they had a world changing calling before them!

Acts 1:12-14 It is amazing to see the change in the brothers and mother of Jesus

- see John 7:1-5, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

The Essentials Of Prayer

- 1) Unified
 - it required 120 Jewish people in a community to establish a council
 - note that Peter and John are listed first (up and coming leaders) and James and John are now separated in the list (hinting at a new, stronger brotherhood)
- 2) Persevering (see verse 14) ... see also Romans 12:12, Col. 4:2

Why do you think that they were required to pray? Wasn't the promise of the Spirit already made?

- prayer is mentioned 31 times in Acts ... in 20 chapters (out of 28)
- note the mention of woman in this group; Christ came to break down cultural barriers
- why do we have to persevere in prayer?
 - perhaps because perseverance gives us increased longing, and increased value
 - Paul, in Ephesians, seems to link perseverance with Spiritual warfare
 - God ordains the best time for prayer to be answered
- The greatest revivals have all been sparked through extended prayer meetings.

- Perhaps the most profound of the spiritual disciplines as we are brought perpetually into the presence of God.
- To pray is to change. If we have an unwillingness to change, we will most assuredly stop praying.
- In prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts, see things from His point of view.
- Yes, God does seem to hear our cries and respond (Isa. 38:1-6).

Prayer in the Bible always seems to have:

- a) Utter belief that what was prayed for would come to pass.

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

- b) Prayer must also be listening as well as talking.
 - Is my heart quiet enough to hear?
- c) Keep it simple
 - The reason God responds to our cries is because His children ask Him
- d) When answers do not come, seek the why?
 - Is God really saying, "no"? Am I asking amiss? Is there sin in my life? Is God saying, "Wait"? Am I really listening?
 - To that end, will I spend time in meditation towards the Lord?
- e) Protection from worry is a power product of prayer (Matthew 6:25)
 - Worry is the disproportionate level of concern based on an inappropriate measure of fear.
 - The false lie: Worry helps us. If I worry, something good will come of it.
 - Note that in the upper room, they were no longer concerned that Jesus was not with them.
 - Read and contemplate Phil 4:6-7. Prayer and worry are on opposite ends of the spectrum.

A Guide:

- 1) Each morning, set aside 10 minutes.
- 2) Think about what you are anxious for right now.
- 3) Write them down in your journal.
- 4) Ask the Lord what you can do to help in these areas.
- 5) As anything is revealed, write it down.
- 6) Turn the rest over to God. Write your request to Him and be specific. Don't let your prayer be vague.
- 7) Journal your successes.

Acts 1:15-26

Matthias becomes the new apostle

- was this correct? Nothing in the text suggests that it was wrong
- the number 12 was important to Israel, but as the Gospel spread to the gentiles, the requirement Diminished.
- Regarding the 120 ...

Functioning in the capacity of a Great Sanhedrin, entrusted with the preservation of Jewish life in a new epoch of Jewish history, the total composition of the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah was of 120 members. Interestingly, the size of a Jewish community that necessitates a Sanhedrin is one that serves a congregation of no fewer than 120 people.

- Is there a contradiction in the story of Judas' death?
 - read Matt. 27:1-5
 - it is entirely possible that the branch on which Judas hung simply broke and allowed his body to crash to the rocks below
- The two Psalms quoted were 69 and 109
- If God can turn betrayal into something good, then bitterness becomes unnecessary
- Note the qualifications of an Apostle:
 - 1) been with Jesus for the 3 years
 - 2) and eye witness of the resurrection
 - 3) the Lord has chosen Him
 - Paul, it can be argued, had a special appointment by the Lord and was taught by Him
- Eph. 2:20 claims the foundation of the church was the Apostles and Prophets
- Note the discernment of God's will:
 - 1) Search the Scriptures
 - 2) Prayer
 - 3) Common sense and unity
 - 4) Trusting God to speak through circumstances
 - 5) Note that the two names came out the community, and were confirmed by the leadership
- when the Spirit came, the need to cast lots was replaced by His leading
- How do we make decisions today?

Acts 2:1-13

- The Holy Spirit is given to the people, the church is born!
- the feast of Pentecost was the Harvest feast celebrating the end of the grain harvest
 - two loaves of bread were offered (Jews and Gentiles?)
 - when the Spirit fell, the Church was born ... see 1Corinth. 12:13
 - According to Rabbinic tradition, Exodus 20:18 was interpreted to mean that God spoke to the then 70 nations on the planet in their own tongue. Also, Rabbinic tradition stated that the giving of the Law was on the Feast of Pentecost
 - The Spirit came suddenly ... have we stopped praying before the Spirit came?
 - The fire and wind came as it did on Mount Sinai
 - Wind = power, Fire = purity, tongues = universality
 - What was heard that day? People speaking in an unknown tongue ... and in languages (unlearned) other than that which was natively spoken by the Galileans. (Glossolalia)
 - What does this teach us about the universality of the church?
 - What does this speak to us in regards to our own personal prejudices?

The Baptism in The Holy Spirit:

- Jesus knew that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to the Church (John 16:5-16)
- The Wesleyan holiness movement has emphasized holiness of heart and life, or entire sanctification, as resulting from this baptism. The Charismatics and Pentecostals have emphasized the power for witness and the sign gifts, such as tongues. Evangelicals like D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey emphasized power for service, especially for witness, as the result of this baptism.

- The wind and fire that accompanied the gift of the Spirit (vv. 2 – 3) are common biblical symbols for the activity of the Spirit. The Greek and Hebrew words for “Spirit” can also mean “wind” and “breath.”
- In the valley of dry bones, wind and breath come and give life to dried-up bones. After that the Lord said, “I will put my Spirit in you and you will live” (Ezek. 37:1 – 14).
- According to Jesus, the blowing of the wind “illustrates the mysterious operation of the Spirit in effecting new birth” (John 3:7 – 8). In both cases the wind was a symbol of regeneration.
- In the prediction of baptism with the Holy Spirit by John the Baptist, the wind (by implication) blows the chaff away (Luke 3:16 – 17). This is a symbol of judgment. Similarly, fire in this same prediction, which burns up the chaff, is a symbol of judgment. In other words, like the coming of the gospel message (2 Cor. 2:15 – 16), the coming of Spirit means life to some and judgment to others (as we will see with Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:3, 9).
- Moreover, fire is also a symbol of the powerful presence of God, as both the fire at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2 – 5) and the pillar of fire at night (Ex. 13:21 – 22) indicate.

Other Ideas Associated With The Feast of Pentecost

- it was considered 50 days after crossing the Red Sea to the giving of the Law.
 - The Law was given to Moses on this day.
 - The 6th Day Of Sivan
 - Exodus 19:19 says that the voice of the Lord was like a trumpet
 - Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai claimed, in the Midrash, that “God’s voice, as it was uttered, split into 70 voices so that all the nations should understand”
 - Further, Rabbi Moshe Weissman claimed that the people actually saw the voice waves emanate from the mouth of God (the trumpet) as fiery breathes (Exodus 20:18 ... the people *perceived* the thunders)
 - Wind, fire ... different languages ... sound familiar?
 - Typically, the Book of Ruth is read at Pentecost each year (our Redeemer!)
 - According to Jewish legend, Enoch was raptured on this day, as well
 - Note that Jesus taught His disciples during this time (Acts 1:3)
 - See Jeremiah 31:31-33 ... where God promises to write His laws in our hearts by His Spirit
 - Pentecost can be seen as an overcoming of the curse of the Tower Of Babel.
-
- The fact that the tongues of fire now rest upon each believer seems to point that the corporate idea of the Spirit associated with a local temple has been replaced with the concept of each of us now bearing the Spirit within.
 - The event reminds me that my Christian walk has a supernatural component to it. There is mystery and spirituality wrapped up in the intellect.
 - Paul connects singing directly with the fullness of the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 – 20, presenting it as an outflow of such fullness: “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord” (NASB). “Speaking,” “singing,” and “making melody” are participles in the Greek related to the imperative, “be filled.” Christians, then, must constantly seek to recapture what Pentecost signified: vibrant intimacy with God and joyous worship that ensues from it. This is just NOT an EVENT ... but a daily process.
 - remember the opposite error ... that we can so satisfied with the experiential side of our Christian walk that we forget the growth that is attained through spiritual disciplines.

What Exactly Is Speaking In Tongues?

- It is a form of prayer life in which the Christian yields him or herself to the Spirit and receives from the Spirit a supernatural (or un-learned human language) language in which to praise (and pray to) the Lord. It is miraculous but combines both human and divine elements.

Common Complaints By Non-Pentecostals:

1) Tongues is out-of-order in a church service

- a careful study of 1 Corinth. 14 will indicate that when the time of teaching has come, a message in tongues is out of order. Paul's main focus in the chapter is that order be maintained such that teaching is not disturbed.

2) The gifts of the Spirit ended with the Apostles

- see 1Corinth. 13:8-10, 2Tim. 4:20
- Anecdotal evidence throughout history confirms miracles have not ceased
- no mention is made of the "laying on of hands" in Acts 10:44
- the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles (Eph. 2:20)
- why is there so much of the New Testament devoted to this teaching if the gifts were to cease?
- Also see 1Corinth. 13:8-10 and ask yourself, what was the "Perfect" that was spoken of?

3) Now that we have the Word of God, we don't need messages from God

- 1Cor. 14:3 gives the purposes of the prophetic gifts. Has their need ended?

4) Tongues were only a sign to validate the preaching of Apostles in the Book Of Acts

- why does Paul command that we not let them cease in the church (1Cor. 14:39)

5) Everything God has to offer me was appropriated at my salvation.

- The issue here is whether or not the Apostles were "saved" when Jesus was taken into Heaven. In other words, was the Day Of Pentecost a second encounter with God (i.e. the first being salvation) or were they saved and baptized all the same time. It seems clear that the Apostles were baptized themselves before this day (John 3:22, 26 and 4:2). Acts 2:38 seems to indicate a distinction between the two. There is no question that we are complete in Christ Jesus (Col. 2:10), but God still grants gifts and fruit to us as we grow. For example, the disciples could not cast out the demon in Mark 9, but with prayer and fasting (29). Christians grow in the Lord and as such, He grants new power and responsibility.

6) Only some are to receive the gift of tongues (see 1Corinth. 12)

- a distinction is made between the general operation of tongues and the Gift of Tongues and Interpretation. Paul claims to speak in an unknown tongue more than any (1Corinth. 14:18) but in the church setting where there are those to be taught, he would rather use the language that is understood (1Corinth. 14:14-17) or follow the tongue with an interpretation. (See all verse 5).

7) If we are still in the age of miracles, why can't we empty the hospitals?

- remember that there is no promise in Scripture of everyone being healed and God's ultimate will is still in effect! Also, remember that God's promises are conditional ... upon faith. We find few promises of God leveled at the unbeliever. (See Matthew 13:58)

8) I know of those that have never spoken in tongues performing miracles.

- There is no question as to this fact. Christ granted to his Apostles (and later the 70) the power to work miraculous wonders, yet still insisted that they wait in the upper room for this coming. (Matt 10, Luke 10)

9) What does this experience do for me?

- If truly it is of God, would you not want everything that the Lord has for you?

- There is a deepening of prayer life (See Romans 8:26-27)
- There is a deepening of assurance in my heart (see Romans 8:15-16, 1John 4:13)
- There is a deepening understanding of the Scripture (1John 2:26-27, John 16:12-13)
- There is a more definitive sense of the leading of the Lord (Act 16:6-8)

10) *God's revelation to mankind ended with the Scriptures and there is no more revealed truth to come.*

-either speaking in an unknown tongue or having a message in tongues and interpretation has never constituted new revealed truth. Nothing can and will ever be revealed as "more of the Bible". However, Paul gives the purposes of these words in 1Corinth. 14:3.

11) *Not all will speak in tongues (based on 1Cor. 12:30).*

- we must draw a distinction between the Gift of Tongues (1 Corin. 12) and the ability to praise God in tongues. In passages like Acts 2, Acts 10, Acts 19 it is evident that all could pray in tongues, but there was NO interpretation required. In 1 Corinth. 12 - 14, Paul speaks of edifying the church using the Gift Of Tongues combined with the Gift Of Interpretation.

12) *When Acts 2 occurred, they were speaking in only known languages.*

- perhaps somewhere, but there are three things to consider:

- a) Why were they accused of being drunk? If all they were doing was praying God in a known language, the charge makes little sense
- b) During Acts 10:47, the Spirit fell on Gentile believers. They spoke in other tongues. Nowhere does it indicate that they spoke in a known language. Yet, Peter recognizes instantly the super natural event as he says that it "happened to them like it happened to us"
- c) What are tongues of angels and men (1Corinth 13:1)

13) *It is all too emotional for me.*

-perhaps this is true, but it is the worst of all reasons to deny this doctrine completely. Can anyone argue that the Bible is filled with illustrations of praise to God that is anything but emotional? Singing, shouting, clapping, playing music, dancing etc. are all pretty emotional events. Based on 1 Corinth. 14, the prophet (being used in a gift) is always in control.

Issues To Consider:

- 1) No one can "teach" you how to speak in tongues
- 2) Tongues is an evidence of the experience and is NOT to be sought after
 - see Mark 16:17-18
- 3) God times this gift - no human being can say that you "should have" received or you are in sin because you did not receive. This is utter "spiritual pride"
- 4) Your salvation is complete in the work of Christ on the Cross
- 5) Don't confuse the Gifts of the Spirit with the Fruit of the Spirit. In other words, even people who speak in tongues do foolish and hurtful things! (Not perfection ... see Acts 21:10)

Note again that there will always be rejection associated with the Gospel and anything that God is directly associated with. The mockers will always be among us.

Acts 2:14-41

Peter's First Message

- There at least 19 such messages in the book of Acts
 - 8 by Peter, 1 by Stephen, 1 by James and 9 by Paul
- Note that for the first time, Peter's leadership emerges
- Note the elements of the Gospel Message:
 - 1) The life of Christ (2:22)
 - 2) His death (2:23)
 - 3) His resurrection (2:24-32) ... Psalm 16:8-11
 - 4) His exultation (2:33-36) ... Psalm 110
 - 5) His salvation (2:37-39)
 - 6) His new community (2:40-41)
- note that 3000 were "made alive" that day, as opposed to 3000 who were killed when the Law was given (Exodus 32:28). The list of the various nations represented in Acts 2 is similar to that found in Genesis 10 (the table of nations).
- We must make clear to people:
 - 1) The Gospel events
 - 2) The Gospel witnesses (The eye witnesses, OT prophecy)
 - 3) The Gospel good news
 - 4) The Gospel conditions

The ancient Christian *kerygma* as summarized by Dodd from Peter's speeches in the New Testament Book of Acts was:

- 1) The Age of Fulfillment has dawned, the "latter days" foretold by the prophets.
- 2) This has taken place through the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- 3) By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God as Messianic head of the new Israel.
- 4) The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.
- 5) The Messianic Age will reach its consummation in the return of Christ.
- 6) An appeal is made for repentance with the offer of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

Acts 2:42-27

The Signs Of A Growing Church

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a) A learning church (2:42) | b) A loving church (verse 42, 44) |
| c) A fellowshiping church (2:42) | d) A worshipping church |
| e) An evangelistic church (2:47) | |
- to fellowship ... *koinonia* ... to have something in common ... to share together
 - note that the sharing of goods was always voluntary
 - fellowship was both formal and informal (in homes and the in temple)
 - Is going it alone truly a sign of strength? Does it make life easier?

Fellowship or *koinonia*, defined as Love and Acceptance, Care and Compassion, Support and Forgiveness, Encouragement & Availability, Informality and Flexibility, Honesty and Humility

- It defines the horizontal dimension of Christianity

The Purpose of a Church:

W	worship	Acts 2:47a
I	instruction	Acts 2:43
F	fellowship	Acts 2:46
E	expression ...	Acts 2:44-45

We tend to be great in all but the fellowship area

Based on this text, fellowship can be characterized by:

- 1) all believers; no distinctions or discriminations
- 2) it held believers together, even in diversity and persecution
- 3) it met the needs of believers

By definition, Agape love is the kind of love that seeks the very best for someone.

There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken, but it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy or the risk of tragedy is damnation. The only place you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is hell.

C.S. Lewis

There begins here an outbreak of persecution against the early church and it is forced to scatter

- With regards to teaching, it is interesting to note that the only ability-related qualification mentioned was the ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). All the other qualifications had to do with the behavior, character, and reputation of the person.
- Remember that "favour" with those outside of the Body may endure for a season, but it often does not last long.

Acts 3:1-10

God heals a cripple

- Why this miracle recorded amidst all of the others? It is didactic.
- if we want to make an impact on this culture, we must be willing to:
 - a) continue "in the temple" i.e. fellowship with believers (3:1)
 - what does the Lord desire to teach me through other people?
 - when I analyze why I don't like someone, what do I learn about myself?
 - b) willing to take time to minister (3:1)
 - Note that this was the 9th hour ... the same hour that Jesus was crucified.
 - c) make personal identification with the sick and needy (3: 4) (Look at me)
 - d) be willing to humble ourselves in their sight (3:4-5)
 - e) understand the true value of what we have to offer (3:6)
 - f) TAKE them to the temple (3:8)
 - g) don't let them go until they are ready to stand on their own (3:11)
 - h) be ready to give the Lord glory (3:12)
- interesting to note that Jesus must have seen this man during His ministry and did not heal him. The Lord leaves these things in our care!
- do we look at opportunists like this man and ignore them? After all, he was being brought to the Temple so he could beg of those entering in.

Acts 3:11-26

Peter preaches a second time

- note verse 17 ... this must be our heart when ministering to the lost. They don't know better!
- why does he use the word "brothers" in this exchange?
- note also that verse 25 is GOOD NEWS! Not "pie in the sky" promises but good news
- verse 16 leads us to believe that the exchange between Peter and the man was more detailed than is recorded here. The man believed on Jesus!
- note that Peter's sermon directed people away from the miracle and from the apostles and towards Jesus

"One of the reasons why mature people stop growing and learning," says John Gardner, "is that they become less and less willing to risk failure." Most young people and adults today think that the purpose of life is to have a good time. For the sake of a good time,

they are willing to take enormous risks. Why? Because they value the fleeting pleasures of life more than life itself. That is why teenagers are easily drawn into dangerous sports, reckless driving, drugs, promiscuous sex, and violence. That is why these same vices persist into adulthood. Why however, do we feel that taking a risk for Jesus Christ is too risk indeed?

In 1982, "ABC Evening News" reported on an unusual work of modern art a chair affixed to a shotgun. It was to be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly into the gunbarrel. The gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years. The amazing thing was that people waited in lines to sit and stare into the shell's path! They all knew the gun could go off at point blank range at any moment, but they were gambling that the fatal blast wouldn't happen during THEIR minute in the chair. Yes, it was foolhardy, yet many people who wouldn't dream of sitting in that chair live a lifetime gambling that they can get away with sin. Foolishly they ignore the risk until the inevitable self destruction.

Although many people take risks to please themselves, few are interested in taking risks to please God. Certainly there are risks in Christian service. But this kind of risk may yield no immediate pleasure. It is not glamorous or exciting, and the consequences may be very unpleasant.

- * If you work in the nursery, there is a risk that all the babies will start bawling at the same time.
- * If you sing a solo, there is a risk that you might miss the high note, or lose your place and have to start all over again.
- * If you go on door to door visitation, there is a risk that people might heap verbal abuse on you, or laugh at you, to shut the door in your face.
- * If you stand up to give a testimony, there is a risk that you might get nervous and talk in circles and make yourself look foolish.
- * If you become a Christian school teacher, there is a risk that you might not have enough money to live on.
- * If you become a preacher, there is a risk that your flock might rebel against the truth and against you and remove you from their pulpit. Jonathan Edwards, a towering figure in the church back in the eighteenth century, a man credited with sparking the Great Awakening, lost his church when his congregation voted him out in protest against his strong convictions.
- * If you become a missionary, there is a risk that you might get sick on the field and die for lack of proper medical care. Jonathan Goforth, the great missionary to China back in the early 1900s, lost four children due to accidents or diseases they would not have suffered in this country.

- * If you stand for Christ in a country without religious freedom, you might die a martyr's death.

What stops us from taking risks for God? Fear. Fear in itself is not bad unless it keeps us from doing right. Then it is bad indeed. Among the people who will be excluded from the New Jerusalem are the "fearful" (Rev. 21:8), referring to those who let fear drive them away from believing in Christ. For a Christian also, fear is dangerous. Any fear that keeps us from doing the will of God puts us out of fellowship with Him and forfeits His blessing.

What empowers us to overcome fear? Faith. How important is faith? "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

How can we gain enough faith to gladly undertake risk in the service of God? We need to know and apply the five principles of faith.

Principle 1: Without Risk There Is No Reward.

Yet we allow the fear of risk to keep us from gaining the rewards in Christian service. Anyone who works hard for Christ will stand before Him and hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21). But we would rather be safe in suburbia. We would rather sit in our climate controlled homes, surrounded by every conceivable electronic gadget to save work or provide entertainment. We would rather live unruffled but empty lives. Is it possible that risk gives life some sense of meaning?

Principle 2: The Only Risk Lies in Not Serving God.

Perhaps Jonah thought it was dangerous to go to Ninevah. But if so, how did he escape the risk? He boarded a rickety boat and set sail on the tempestuous Mediterranean. The boat came near to sinking, and Jonah was swallowed by a great fish. We can draw many lessons from his book, but perhaps the main lesson is that God can use even a man with no common sense.

Principle 3: Of Whom Shall I Be Afraid? (Psa. 27:1)

Afraid of the devil? The devil is a powerful being. Few Christians today understand the extent of his control over the world system, or even the extent of his influence in the church. We should not revile him or seek to pick a fight with him (Jude 9). Yet we also should not fear him (1 John 4:4). As we work steadily at the tasks God has given us, we should let God take care of the devil.

Afraid of man? We should not fear man, but God (Matt. 10:28). We should fear what He can do to us. If we belong to Him, He will not cast us into hell, but He may chasten us. Anyone who has suffered the chastening of the Lord knows what it means to fear Him.

Principle 4: There Is No Power without a Step of Faith.

Before Jesus exercised His power to heal, He required the afflicted person or someone else on his behalf to take a step of faith. For example, when He met a man who was deaf and dumb, He took the man aside and "put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened" (Mark 7:33-4). Why did Jesus touch the man's tongue? He was letting the man know His intention to heal him so that he could respond with faith.

A step of faith is therefore the key to obtaining God's power. If we lack faith, our prayer should be what man said who brought his demon possessed son to Jesus. When the man pleaded with Jesus to heal his son, Jesus replied, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). The man "cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

When you serve the Lord, you may not sense much help from the Holy Spirit until you get busy. When you go soulwinning, for example, the Spirit will not carry you to the door or ring the doorbell or open your mouth. He may not even relieve your jitters. But when you open your mouth, He will help you.

Principle 5: The Proof of the Spirit Lies Not in the Process but in the Result.

When you are serving in the Spirit, God may or may not enable you to give a good performance. If He does not, there are three possible reasons.

1. He wants to keep you humble.
2. He wants to keep you dependent on Him—to preserve in your heart a constant seeking after His help.
3. He wants to test your willingness to persevere despite difficulties.

Yet if a good performance is necessary for some good purpose, God will enable you to give it. When you speak for Him, He may put an awe inspiring authority in your voice. They said of Jesus, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). James and John were called Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder."

But again, the proof of the Spirit lies not in the process, but in the result. The greatest moving of the Holy Spirit in America was the Great Awakening, back in the 1730s. The preacher that God used to spearhead the Great Awakening was Jonathan Edwards, who was one of the most learned and intellectual men ever to fill a pulpit in this country. His works on philosophy are still read today. But he was hardly an exciting preacher. He did not move around. He looked straight ahead. He did not raise his voice. He spoke very slowly and distinctly. Sometimes he read his sermon. Yet when people heard him, they felt that they were moments away from standing before an Almighty Judge.

Was Edwards effective because of his preaching methods, his rhetorical devices, his vocal technique? No, because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. If we must take risks for Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who is the key to success. He overcomes our fears, gives us faith, and works through us to bless others.

- Note that this sermon was preached and recorded but the response was NOT. Why?
- Though John is not heard speaking here, the truth is that the Book of Acts underscores the value of team ministry.
- Note that Peter spends significant time deflecting attention away from himself and towards Jesus.

Acts 4:1-22 The Apostles First Trial

- note that when God begins a new work, there are always struggles
- according to verse 4, even while being taken to jail, many people believed!
- the Sanhedrin was a collection of 71 members and one high priest
- verse 13 says much: Will people take note of us that we have been with Jesus?
- verse 19 gives us the basis for civic rebellion:
 - 1) There is no personal gain

- 2) There is no violence
 - 3) There is no personal rebellion
 - 4) There is a humble admission of serving the Lord
 - 5) There is an expectation of facing further penalties
- note that the leaders of the Sanhedrin made no charge against the resurrection. This tells us that they were unable to deny the facts of Jesus' return!

Acts 4:23-31 Sanhedrin orders Peter and John to stop preaching the gospel and threatens them.

- It's natural to be afraid in those circumstances. How do the Apostles handle the situation?
 - 1) They say no to the Sanhedrins' orders they do not give in to fear!
 - note that they were unlearned, ordinary (4:13)
 - note that Peter was filled with the Spirit (4:8)
 - 2) They tell the Church what happened to them
 - 3) They pray with the church,
 - What they pray:
 - a) They praise/worship God
 - b) They relate their circumstances to scripture
 - c) They tell God what is happening to them while acknowledging that God willed it to happen
 - d) They petition God for help "enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness."
 - 4) God responded!
 - a) The meeting place was shaken
 - b) They were filled with the Holy Spirit (Again!!!!)
 - c) They spoke the word of God boldly

Acts 4:23-31 The Church Prays

- when troubles come, what is our first recourse?
- note that before petition, they made statements of God's divine will and authority
- note the three requests:
 - 1) consider them (not deliver, or make it easy)
 - 2) great boldness to preach
 - 3) miracles of great mercy (not divine judgment!)

Acts 4:32-36

- verse 31 mentions that the Apostles were "refilled" with the Spirit (God's refreshing can continually come upon His believers)
- note that the immediate result was a boldness to testify - the secondary effect was to put into practice what they believed
- Luke gives two independent accounts of the believers (2:4-47) and here
- Note The Three Qualities
 - A) A radical attitude
 - had everything in common
 - they did not renounce ownership (see 5:4), rather they viewed their possessions as tools to minister
 - B) Sacrificial Actions
 - in both cases, the acts were un-coerced and sporadic (as the need arose)
 - C) They gave proportionately to the need that none would suffer want
- We are introduced here to Barnabas here - before a worker in the church, he was a compassionate giver!

Acts 5:1-10

- we need to see Satan's plan of attack - Persecution follows Pentecost
 - 1) First, he starts with violence
 - 2) Then he moves to moral corruption (what we are about to study)
 - 3) Finally, his most cunning plan was distraction - to move the Apostles from their original plan and purpose
- we can see here that there are still problems in the church (even the Apostolic age!).
- the story can be compared to that of Achan at Jericho and Ai. In both cases, an act of deceit attempts to block what God wants to continue to do in the lives of His people.
- note again that the giving was totally voluntary
- Ananias and Sapphira chose in their hearts to lie and to steal (Gr. Hold back) from the church)
- they lied, stole and attempted to claim a reputation that was not theirs to claim
- Some Thoughts From This Tale:
 - 1) Why is it better to give anonymously?
 - 2) When I sin, do I really believe that I sin against God?
 - 3) Will we ever have a pure church?
 - 4) How important is a pure conscience? (See Acts 24:16, 1John 1:7)
- Is God concerned when a grab at a reputation to which I do not deserve?

1John:1:7: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

- 5) How important is church discipline today?
- 6) Is there a relationship between this act and the great powerful miracles that occur in the next section of our study (5:12-16)

Acts 5:12-16

- great healings were taking place
- note that many people remained aloof towards the men and women of God, yet many others believed
- Our identification with people can bring them close but our holiness should also push them away.
- The trinity of identification WITH people, power to HELP people and holiness towards God makes the church beautiful. People NEED TO SEE that we are different, not the same.

Acts 5:17-21

- Do not expect that when God begins to move in supernatural ways, that there will not be intensifying persecution - even when God moves to reduce the level of persecution.
- Note that the reason for the persecution was jealousy (5:17, 28)
- Leaders must always realize that power and sway over people is not the answer.
- Were they NOT responsible for the blood of Christ anyway?
- The arrest probably happened towards evening, forcing the trial until the next day. It may be that the arrests were made privately (without the public's knowledge). Why then would the angel release the apostles, then allow them to be re-arrest the next morning?
- Our task to obey with or without the divine deliverance.

Civil Disobedience vrs. The Respect Of Authority

Four basic authority structures:

- Parents over children
- Employers over employees
- Government over people

Submitting to the teaching of the Word through the Church.

Purposes?

- 1) To grow in wisdom and character (as Jesus did in Luke 3 - His childhood)
- 2) To gain protection from destructive temptations
 - God grants us the ability to learn from those over us!
- 3) Clear direction for life decisions
 - Matthew 8:10 great faith from centurion?

God uses those in authority over us to curb our characters

Proverb:29:1: He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

- the way that we respond to human authority is exactly the way we will respond to God's authority
- Some Things To Think About When Squeezed By Authority:
 - 1) Are my attitudes of response mature, Christian responses
 - 2) Do I really understand the basic intentions of those in authority above me?
 - 3) Have I created alternatives
 - 4) Have I waited for the changes to take place
 - do I really believe that God will make even my enemies to be at peace with me?

Proverb:16:7: When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

- only now can we be ready to suffer the consequences of doing what is right!
- note that in the sermon preached here by the Apostles, the common element of the resurrection of Christ is again prominent.
- Civil disobedience should be seen as a statement of protest and persuasion, not coercion.
- note also that it is at the intervention of the more tolerant Pharisee Gamaliel, that they obtained their freedom. Gamaliel's most famous student - Saul (see Acts 22:3)
- we see a leadership style here that is worth mentioning:
 - a) restrain anger: decisions can never be made emotionally
 - b) respond cautiously: Is this of God or not?
 - c) present facts
 - d) move ahead slowly: God's timing is not always ours
 - e) understand that things we don't necessarily see can still be of God
- Is Gamaliel's principle (verse 38) an accurate one?
- The Apostles left the place with 39 lashes, yet rejoicing
 - "the honour to be dishonoured ... the grace to be disgraced"

The devil has never given up the attempt to destroy the church by force. Under Nero (AD 54-68) Christians were imprisoned and executed, including probably Paul and Peter. Domitian (AD 81-96) oppressed Christians who refused to pay him the divine honours he demanded; under him John was exiled to Patmos. Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180), believing that Christianity was dangerous and immoral, turned a blind eye to severe local outbreaks of mob violence. Then in the third century what had so far been sporadic became systematic. Under Decius (AD 249-251) thousands died, including Fabian, Bishop of Rome, for refusing to sacrifice to the imperial name. The last persecuting emperor before the conversion of Constantine was Diocletian (AD 284-305). He issued four edicts which were intended to stamp out Christianity altogether. He ordered churches to be burned, Scriptures to be confiscated, clergy to be tortured, and Christian civil servants to be deprived of their citizenship and, if stubbornly unrepentant, executed. Still today, especially in some Marxist, Hindu and Moslem countries, the church is often harassed. But we need not fear for its survival. Tertullian, addressing the rulers of the Roman Empire, cried out:

"Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust.... The more you mow us down, the more we grow; the seed is the blood of Christians." Or, as Bishop Festo Kivengere said in February 1979, on the second anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda: 'Without bleeding the church fails to bless.' Persecution will refine the church, but not destroy it. If it leads to prayer and praise, to an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God and of solidarity with Christ in his sufferings, then - however painful - it may even be welcome.

-John Stott

Acts 6:1-7

- Perhaps the most diabolical attempt by Satan thus far, was to distract the Christian church!
- it is wise to note that not all complaining is wrong! We must be willing to examine the underlying issues. It is never wise to ignore issues!
- God's giftings include "administration". Needs must be ministered to
- What does this scripture tell us about the need for the church to minister to the needy?
- What is the advantage of gathering everyone together (6:2) to examine a problem?
- the social work was not less important than the ministry work - yet there is the issue of "calling" to be considered. Do we dilute our effectiveness by not fulfilling our calling?
- please note that God calls ALL of His people into ministry - not just some - both the Word ministry and the social ministry. Neither is more important than the other
- when ALL take on their God directed ministries, the Word of God spreads (see verse 7)
- Note the qualifications: Of good report, full of the Spirit and full of wisdom.
- What are the principles here we can use to solve crisis around us?
 - a) Don't ignore the problem
 - b) Don't be content to attack the complainers
 - c) Act as a group. Share the burden. Know your strengths.
 - d) Deal with the problem with sensitivity (Note all of the chosen men had Greek names!)
 - e) Don't negate the physical over the spiritual
 - f) Secular giftings do not trump spiritual hearts. BOTH are required in the Church.

Acts 6:8-7:59 The Stoning Of The Deacon Stephen

- Three major themes of this sermon
 - 1) God does not move just in Israel ... He is evident everywhere
 - He moved in Egypt, the Red Sea and in the wilderness (Mt. Sinai)
 - He is not just a desert god, nor a water god, nor a territorial god.
 - 2) Worship does not just happen at the temple
 - God spoke through the Tabernacle
 - The burning bush, Babylon, belly of a great fish ...
 - 3) People have often ignored the prophets of God
 - Joseph was rejected by his own
 - Moses himself was rejected
 - David too was rejected on occasion.
- Christ and Moses are similar and complementary
 - a) An unusual birth (7:20)
 - b) Death of babies at both births (7:19)
 - c) Both children came out of Egypt (7:21)
 - d) Christ, like Moses, was rejected by His people (7:25, 35, 39)
 - e) Both were sent by the Father (7:35b)
 - f) Both did signs and wonders (7:36)
 - g) Moses prophesized regarding Jesus (7:37)

Other Similarities:

- Lifted something up for healing; giver of bread in the wilderness; both called prophets
- Both were hidden as children to escape slaughter
- Both give covenants to the people
- Both knew the Father in ways unlike their peers
- Moses and Jesus both took "gentile brides"
- Moses was at a well and was kind to the daughters of the Midian priests. He watered their flock, which was not a common practice at that time (Exodus 2:17). Jesus was at a well and was kind to a Samaritan woman. He

offered her water (John 4:9-11). This practice was also uncommon. The water Jesus offered was the water of salvation.

- Both Moses and Jesus saw blood as the liberator
- Each instituted a meal to remember the covenant.
- Both gave instructions from a mountain.
- Both had the Father come to them in thick smoke (Mt. Sinai, Mount of Transfiguration). Both glowed from the process.
- Moses intercedes for his people ... as does Jesus.
- Both fasted for 40 days and 40 nights.

- Stephen's Defense

- a) Don't miss what God is doing now, as our forefathers did
 - b) Don't make the temple the object of worship (7:48-49)
 - in each of the cases cited, God moved, not through the Temple, but where the people were (Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon)
 - c) Stop persecuting the prophets (7:52)
- It is important to see Jesus standing here (55-56) – not sitting at the right hand of the Father
 - Saul is introduced here, giving tacit approval to the stoning (7:58, 8:1)
 - Note the same forgiving spirit in Jesus was also in Stephen (60)
 - Through the death of this one man, the Church, which has been situated around Jerusalem, will now spread out to touch the world. Four remarkable men are responsible for this:
 - 1) Stephen the martyr (stirs up opposition within Jerusalem)
 - 2) Philip the evangelist (the one who breaks the Jewish/Samaritan barrier)
 - 3) Saul the convert (Apostle to the gentiles)
 - 4) Cornelius (the one who calls for salvation from the gentile world)
 - it is interesting to note that both Stephen and Philip, as non-apostles, are seen as doing great miracles
 - Funny how that when arguments fail, the enemy of our souls likes to stir up a smear campaign
 - Do we trust the court system too much to eliminate what we don't like about culture?
 - If the temple is not the required place to worship ... where do YOU worship? What is your sacred place?

Acts 8:1-40

Philip The Evangelist

- Note how quickly the tide of antagonism can turn against us
- Saul turns to utter hatred as he imprisons believers (and kills them – 9:1, 22:4, 26:10)
- This is most unlike the heart of his master Gamaliel. Why might this be?
- The great scattering leads to many conversions!
- ONE MAN is about to break 1000 years of racial hostility
 - Is it possible that God has more of these missions in store for people willing to listen??
- Salvation and healing bring great joy to this city.
- Note that the Gospel message is stronger than magic (9-12)
 - We must not let people of renown and power slow our desire to spread the message.
- Simon may have believed the message, but he was clearly not the recipient of a new nature
 - He followed the evangelist around, only to see the miracles.
 - Remember that all power displays are not from God.
- Note that verses 14-17 seem to indicate that the Baptism Of The Holy Spirit was a subsequent act following conversion.
- Why do so many desire to turn the spiritual into the financial?
- True repentance is sincere – Simon's was not. There is no sense that this ever changed in him.

Philip And The Ethiopian

- Sometimes, God draws us away from the action to start a new work (26). Are we open to God

speaking to us about new directions?

- again, note the fact that the Acts of God often draw us from the crowds to the lonely, dusty roads.
 - Can we handle that kind of change?
 - Not all ministries are in the spot light!
- We must always be open to dialog with those of different cultures and beliefs.
- I love the politeness of Philip; willing to ask questions.
- Note that the Eunuch was extremely rich Had his own chariot AND a copy of Isaiah.
- It would have been VERY bold for Philip to approach him.
- The quote was from Isaiah 53.
- The power of knowing the Word of God leads this man to salvation
- It was extremely bold for Philip to baptize this man after only a few moments. Note there was no baptism in the Spirit spoken of. Philip had baptized Simon ... and was MISTAKEN. But he still moves forward here.
- He is taken to Azotus (some 20 miles north of Gaza. He travels north to Caesarea, where we find him some 20 years later, the father of 4 prophetess'
- It is note by accident that this story occupies the same number of verses as the revival in Samaria. BOTH are equally as important. We must not forget this!
- What can be said of the Ethiopian who uses his travel time to READ and grow?

Some Comparison And Differences Between These Two Stories

- Joy results from conversions (verses 8, 39)
- Jesus is the central message of all the preaching (12, 35)
- Hearers believed and were baptized (12, 36-38)
- People in both stories were not Jewish
- Samaritan were ordinary folks, the eunuch was a man from the royal court
- Samaritans were haters of the Jews; the eunuch was a sincere, thoughtful Jewish seeker

Call Narratives

- How does God call His prophets? There are several passages that define the call narrative in the Old Testament

Elements	Moses (Exod)	Gideon (Judg)	Samuel (1 Sam)	Isaiah (Isa)	Jeremiah (Jere)	Ezekiel (Eze)	Micaiah (1 Kg)
Confrontation	3:7-9	6:11-13	3:2-10	6:1-7	[1:3]	2:1-2, 3:12-15, 22-24	22:19
Commission	3:10	6:14	3:11-14	6:8-13	1:4-5	2:3-8a, 3:4-11, 16-21, 25-27	22:20-21
Objections	3:11,13, 4:1,10, 13	6:15			1:6		
Assurance	3:12, 14-22, 4:2-9, 11-12, 14-17	6:16			1:7-10, 17-19		
Sign	[4:2-9, 17]	6:17-24			1:11-16	2:8b-3:3	

There are normally five components to a prophet's call:

- 1) situation of distress or crisis in which God confronts the person
- 2) the commissioning of the person for some action or message
- 3) objections raised by the person in the form of inadequacy for the task
- 4) assurance of God's help, often in the formula "I will be with you"
- 5) a sign to confirm the commission, often with the content of the commission

Note that God must call a prophet... one cannot campaign to become one. God so often chooses these outspoken leaders from the least likely sources.

Now compare this to Saul's calling

- Interesting that a Pharisee would go to a Saduceean high priest. This is unusual! What zeal to protect the old order.
- Jesus is used here as His earthly name. The earthly Jesus is ALIVE!
- We must see this event as BOTH a conversion AND a commission!

Acts 9:1-9

This Guy Named Saul (er Paul?)

- Three times in the book of Acts is this story recorded - once here by Luke and twice as the author quotes Paul's messages - it says much for the power of our testimony!
- Although not all the elements of his conversion are typical of today, some of them indeed are:
 - 1) a personal encounter with Christ in faith and repentance is required.
 - 2) a growing awareness of the Spirit of the Lord should be present within us
 - 3) a radical (perhaps over time) shift in our thought processes will occur
 - 4) this is not a sudden salvation, without prior conviction (see Acts 26:14)
 - not only was there the goads of conviction, but the trial of Stephen
 - 5) the call was not compulsive
 - note the question that Jesus asks. He appeals to Paul's intellect!
 - 6) the salvation was a free gift of grace
 - some atypical aspects of this salvation:
 - a) the blinding light
 - b) a physical encounter with Christ
 - c) God specifically choosing this man for salvation, and a particular, specific ministry
 - God takes here, all the initiative
- note the language of Jesus - to persecute His people is to persecute Him

Acts 9:10-25

The Welcome Into The Church

- immediately, Paul is seen fasting and praying - enjoying a new relationship with the Father that he had never known. It is certain that the Lord was bringing back Scripture into his mind at this time, such that as he began to preach, he could now see Jesus in the Old Testament
- William Barclay calls Ananias one of the hidden heroes of the Church. Why?
- Doesn't it say much about this man that he knew Saul was coming with authority to cast them into jail (perhaps even murder) (see verse 14) and he did not flee Damascus?
- note the laying on of hands. What a powerful communication to a blind man. This is the kind of ministry that should be happening at our alter calls as well!
- it is amazing that this community accepted Saul, but they did
- according to Gal. 1:17, Paul spends three years here and in Arabia before going to Jerusalem (Arabia reached almost to the city of Damascus). We need time to be alone (or quiet) with the Lord. Paul had much here to learn.
- verse 25 gives an interesting detail as to his leadership abilities! Note that leaders still need "Barnabas" like people in their lives (defn: Son Of Encouragement)

- True or false: True conversion always brings about a need for Christian fellowship or community (i.e. being part of a church).
- Acts 22:17-21 tells us that it was Jesus who told Paul to get out of Jerusalem.
- Paul would spend the next 7-8 years in his home town of Tarsus, incognito
- Note the five signs of a healthy church:

1) Peace	3) encouragement	5) godliness
2) strength	4) growth	

Acts 9:32 - 11:18 Nothing Can Stand In The Way Of The “Way”

- over the next few chapters, we see difficult things attempting to stand in the way of the Gospel and one by one, they are removed: Sickness, Death, Prison, Political Tyranny!
- The Healings Of Aeneas and Tabitha (9:32-43)
 - Now that there is peace in Jerusalem, Peter is free to travel
 - How important is it that he visited the saints (to offer encouragement)?
 - Do we view this kind of encouragement as necessary?
 - What value was there in Peter sending out the weeping and wailing people from the room?
 - Note who gets the glory in both cases!

Acts 10:1-48 The Story Of Cornelius ... The First Purely Gentile Convert

- Racial and religious discrimination must be healed by the Lord
- Peter had been staying with one Simon the tanner. He worked with dead animals and so was considered ceremoniously unclean. Must we put ourselves in positions to challenge our convictions
- True or false: God WANTS His church to be truly multi-cultural and multinational
- Remember that it was at Joppa centuries before, that a rebellious Jonah tried to run from God’s desire of a non-Jewish revival
- Why didn’t the angel preach the Gospel to Cornelius?
- What does it tell us when we consider a MILITARY man was trying to serve God. It must be real if he was trying in that atmosphere!
- Note that the vision of clean and unclean animals would be enough to disgust any orthodox Jew.
- Three times came the command ... and the sheet was taken into heaven (symbol of the church untied together in Christ
- note how perfectly God dovetails the work in both Peter and Cornelius
- note that by Peter’s entrance into the house, he has exposed two extreme positions that we can take with respect to other people: Deify them or reject them as worthless
- Peter starts his sermon with a humble statement of what he had learned - all preachers need to keep on learning!
- These believers were baptized in the Spirit before the water
- Note that the Spirit did not prevent them from the need for human teachers as well (verse 48)

Acts 11:1-18 Peter Is Required To Justify His Actions

- God uses business meetings to further His cause!
- We should not be afraid to give an account for what the Lord does through us
- It is interesting that when an issue of contention arose, they were not afraid to let it be dealt within a public setting!
- It is good to see that Peter used wisdom in bringing witnesses with him to the event at Cornelius’ house. They could now testify on his behalf.
- Peter was required to be bold and innovative - is this lacking in the Christian church today?
- Note the charge (verse 2) ... had nothing to do with baptizing Cornelius
- this was not a spiritual question at all!

- What can be said of Peter, who here fights so hard for the Gentiles, and yet in Galatians (2:11-12), he has forgotten and slide back to the old way? What must we guard? (This took place some 12 - 14 years later)
- Their criticism ceased ... their worship began (F.F. Bruce)

Acts 11:19-29 The Gentile Church

- verse 18 is a powerful, world changing verse - the Gospel is now being preached to the Gentiles. How afraid we should be when we accept the idea that God can only work in the way that WE think He should?
- verse 19 is a pickup from Chapter 8:1-4. Note that the messengers are un-named. How much work goes on by un-named servants every day? When life throws us hard circumstances, we don't stop telling people about the goodness of the Lord!
 - Why was Barnabas used so mightily of the Lord?
 - a) He looked for evidence of God alive in these people
 - b) He was gladdened when he saw that evidence
 - c) He was encouraging to the people there
 - d) He recognized when he needed help
 - he remembered Saul's gifting - call to the Gentiles (9:15, 27)
 - e) He stayed with the people a good length of time
- Further Thoughts On Giving:
 - a) It was pro-active, not re-active (see verses 27-28)
 - b) It was according to means (verse 29)
 - c) There was financial accountability (verse 30)
 - d) Note that salvation always is accompanied by compassionate hearts
 - What might be the significance of the term "brothers" in verse 29?

Acts 12:1-19 The Power Of Prayer - Peter is spared

- the Herod here is Herod Agrippa, grandson to Herod the Great (hated by the Jews as the whole family was a friend of Caesar's and of Edomite background)
- why did the persecution start now? Perhaps it started with the pious Jews hating the fact that Jews were beginning to mingle with gentiles.
- this is the third imprisonment of Peter and his miraculous escape the last time may be the reason he is so bound this time - somebody must have believed the miraculous story of his previous liberation!
- note the timing of this event ... just after Passover ... not far off our Easter
- why might the Lord wait until the last possible night before rescuing Peter (verse 6)
- what does it say of Peter ... that he was sleeping? (especially when considering the fact that Christ prophesied that he would be a martyr?)
- the description of the house indicated that Mary, John Mark's mother was well-to-do
- verse 16 describes an all-night prayer meeting that was not run by the local leadership - it was a "grass roots" effort
- Peter is forced to flee Jerusalem ...now there are no Apostles left in the city, yet the church still goes forward under the leadership of James, the half-brother of Jesus
- James killed ... His brother John exiled ... Peter spared ... NO ONE can understand God's plan fully - there is little value in questioning God on these unknowable issues!

Where Is The Place Of Prayer For The Believer Today?

What Happens When We Pray:

- a) God grants peace ... see Phil 4:6-7
- b) We ultimately move the heart of God (Genesis 18:16-33, Isaiah 38 etc.)
- c) Through God, we know God (Luke 22:39-45)
- d) There is power that the Lord grants (Matthew 17:21, 21:22)

- e) I recognize more clearly that these issues cannot be handled by me alone (Phil. 1:19, James 5:15)
- f) God often grants the requests of our hearts (Matt. 7:9-11)

A Beautiful Illustration

- see Exodus 17:8-13
- as long as Moses' hands were raised (to God in prayer), the battle moved for Israel

Some Myths Regarding Prayer

- a) God must do what I say (based on Luke 11:9, for example)
 - this must be balanced against:
 - Matt 18:19 (why two or three??)
 - John 15:7 (what does it mean to abide?)
 - John 14:13 (who gets the glory when my request is granted?)
 - James 4:3-4 (what effect does motive have on answered prayer?)
 - 1John 5:14 (whose will is important here?)
 - Matthew 21:21-22 (what element does faith play?)
 - James 5:16-17 (what place does righteousness (sin) and passion play?)

- b) God really doesn't have the power to do what He says
 - has God done the miraculous in the past?
 - we may truly doubt this
 - is God immutable (unchanging)? (Mal. 3:6, Hebrews 13:8)

- c) God doesn't have the desire to answer
 - see Matthew 7:7-12
 - what kind of father doesn't desire to do the best for His people
 - God still wants glory in this world - we are the vessels He chooses to manifest that.

 - Example Of Acts 12:
 - a) A group setting over a specific need
 - b) A prayer meeting that lasted through the night
 - c) A meeting run by lay people

 - The Example Of Daniel: (Daniel 6:10-11)
 - a) No circumstance should keep us from prayer
 - b) Prayed on his knees, facing Jerusalem
 - posture has meaning
 - faced Jerusalem as a reminder
 - c) Prayer was made three times daily
 - d) Purpose was for thanksgiving and requests for help

 - The Results Of Prayer
 - a) God sometimes says "yes"
 - b) God sometimes says "no"
 - c) God often times says "wait"

Some Thoughts On The Practical Side Of Prayer

- There are times of both corporate prayer and private prayer; both are necessary
- Try to quiet your mind before rushing in!
- do what it takes to eliminate the distractions
- try to create a "prayer closet"
- Spend at least some time listening!

- How often do we “Amen” and go, without tarrying a bit and waiting on the Lord?
- Try to set aside the same time each day for your devotional time: No guilt allowed
- Don’t focus on the length of the prayer or the words spoken
- Don’t allow yourself to fall into the trap of repeating the same phrase over and over
- it is important to mean what you say and use the language that you are used to (Psalm 62:8)
- Allow yourself the time to fully express your emotions to God
- you can’t hide yourself ... so don’t try
- Pray specifically
- keep a prayer journal (if it works for you) ... but pray in a way that you will know when God answers!
- Remember the balance of what is spoken:
 - A ... Adoration (worship to the Lord for who He is)
 - C ... Confessions (Lord ... forgive me)
 - T ... Thanksgiving (praising God for needs met)
 - S ... Supplication (asking for needs to be met)
- the focus must be on God ... not the mountains we are praying about!
- some on-going questions for God:
 - 1) What is the next step in my character development?
 - 2) What is the next step with my family ?
 - 3) What is the next step with my ministry?
 - 4) What is the next step in my vocation ... dating ... education ... giving ...

Acts 12:20-25 Death Of Herod

- Josephus reports that the king was carried away during the speech, and died five days later
- consider the first and last two verses of this chapter and the way that the Lord can bring about a complete reversal of the situations faced by the church!
- in light of Luke’s explanation of the death of Herod, how important is it truly that God gets the glory for the events and blessings of our lives?

Paul’s Missionary Journeys Begin

- the focus of the book changes now and leaves the Apostles behind. Luke begins to focus on how the Gospel moves to the world of the Gentiles.

Acts 13:1-3 The Commission

- On or around this time, Paul had an unusual experience that he writes about in 2 Corinthians 12:2-10
- He describes that 12 years earlier (around 42 or 43 AD), he was caught up to heaven
- He was then given a thorn in the flesh
- this would have happened either just before or during his call to evangelize

1) Mystical experiences, though uncommon, do occur - but they should motivate us to move forward in our Christian walk, to serve, to minister - never to self-glorify (as did Herod!)

2) Thorns in the flesh are never a reason to stop ministering or to challenge us to quit

- Note the wide range of leaders at Antioch
 - Barnabas ... full of compassion and encouragement (a people person), also a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36)
 - Simeon called Niger (black) ... of dissimilar ethnic origin (possibly Simon of Cyrene)
 - Lucius ... from North Africa
 - Manaen ...rich and influential, well connected (this Herod [Antipas] was the one who put John the Baptist to death ... see also Luke 8:3 for Joanna)
 - Saul ... highly trained and intelligent

- Some Thoughts About This Passage:

- 1) How do you think that the Spirit revealed it to the church?
- 2) What was the purpose of prayer and fasting?
- 3) Why did they fast and pray AGAIN after the call?
- 4) Why did they lay hands on these two?
- 5) Does it bother you that they went without clear directions (not unlike Abraham)?
- 6) Is there a healthy balance with the Spirit direction individuals and the church together?

- Note that 12:25 speaks of a trip to Jerusalem. Paul also speaks of this in Galatians 2:1-10

- Why was it so important to get the blessing of the Jerusalem church before being called to this missionary journey?

Acts 13:4-12

The Journey Begins

- this part of the journey started on the island of Cyprus
- Why here? We are told in Acts 4:36 that Barnabas was from Cyprus
- What does it say that the evangelists decide to “go home” first?
- Note that demonic activity is present immediately after the decision to go forward
- Verse 9 ... Saul (the Jewish name) takes the Roman name “Paul”
- In what ways today is it possible to make the “straight ways of the Lord” crooked??

Acts 13:13

John Mark leaves the group

- It made things more difficult for Paul and Barnabas
- Is it possible that Mark resented the fact that Paul was supplanting his cousin (Barnabas) as the leader of the group?
- Is it possible to know forgiveness and restitution?
- What criteria do you use to judge whether or not to forgive someone?

Acts 13:14-52

Paul’s Message In Pisidia

- Why did the Gentiles respond to the message better than the Jews did?
- What does this tell you about our presuppositions?
- Is it possible for us to unwittingly fulfill Scripture (see verse 27) in a negative way?
- How would I know if I were doing this?
- Is it possible that Christians don’t want to see salvations in people (verse 44)
- It may ruin the church ... it may allow in undesirables ... it may change us???
- By the time that Paul came to this area to preach (Galatia), he was ill, yet this did not stop him from going forward with the ministry (see Gal. 4:13-15). God turns adversity into a powerful event if we let Him.
- Why I Don’t See Pre-Destination In Verse 48
 - a) Luke’s primary focus in the passage is not individuals as much as classes (Jews and Gentiles) ... and the thought certainly may be that both Jews and Gentiles came to faith
 - b) The word “ordained” classically means to either “set into order” or “marshal”
 - it was used with the meaning of aligning troops in a battle
 - Romans 13:1 states that the powers that be (Government) have been “marshaled” or placed into position by the will of God.
 - God’s will was carried out, yet this does not mean that man’s will is disregarded
 - c) Obviously, Paul states that some chose to reject the message by themselves (verse 46)
 - d) Some Galatians fell away from the teaching (Galatians 5:7)
- in Verse 50, we see the hindrance to the Gospel is what human beings stir up
- Are we in the position to stir people up against the Gospel??
- What does it mean to shake the dust off their feet (verse 50)
- Why were the disciples (left behind) filled with joy? Would not they suffer persecution?

Acts 14:1-7

The Trip To Iconium

- same message ... same methodology ... same results
- note that Paul and Barnabas spent much time here correcting the false witnesses
- there was much rumor afoot aimed at these two people
- Is it possible that I believe rumor without every checking out the facts?
- note that even miracles do not make a rejecting heart believe the Gospel

Acts 14:8 - 20

The Trip To Lystra and Derbe

- A name does matter ... the power to define is the power to control
- Note that the Christians would not simply accept any name given to them
- this is the problem of pluralism that tries to see Jesus and God in every religion
- sometimes we let labels stick because we are afraid to be "exclusive"
- Verse 15 is a snub at the Greek mythological "gods"
- In verse 19, we see the power of persuasion ... first they want to sacrifice to Paul, then stone him
- Note that Barnabas was identified with the majestic ruler of the gods and Paul was identified with the angry spokesman (and son) Hermes ... this may shed some light on the appearance of these two men of God!
- Note that Paul's message started "where the people were". There was no Jewish synagogue there and so Paul preaches only what the people know!
- Out of Lystra would come a disciple named ... Timothy (Acts 16:1)! Do you think that Paul thought it was worth it all?

Acts 14:21-28

The Return

- what does it say of the men that they returned and re-visited those in the cities that they had been expelled?
- note the words (verse 22) ... strengthening, encouraging and warning
- are we involved in all of the above?
- we no longer recognize that it is through tribulation that we come into the Kingdom of God (at least in the western world) ... relief or regret???
- What kind of help does a new Christian need?
- Do you (or have you ever) offered that kind of help to a new Christian?

Paul's Missionary Policy

- he went in, preached, taught, debated and won converts
- he organized those converts into churches, to which he appointed leaders
- he encouraged them, prayed for them, visited them and wrote letters to them
- he trusted God to take them and multiply the results
- in ten years, (47AD to 57 AD), he had churches in four provinces: Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia.

Acts 15:1-5

The Problem of Gentile Conversion

- When Christians disagree what is to be done?
- Now that gentiles were flooding into the church, did they need to become Jewish first (by being circumcised)?
- This chapter is utterly key to the rest of church history. Is Christianity just a Jewish offshoot ... or a bonafide New Thing that God is doing. This is the last time Peter is brought into the story!
- As the Gentile church started to evangelize the Gentile world, the Jewish church began to lose control. Why do human beings so desire to control one another?
 - a) I have all the truth and others need me?
 - b) Power means I am someone important?
 - c) God needs me to maintain orthodoxy?
 - d) Happiness means everyone is just like me?
 - e) If it works for me, then it must work for you?
- Is it ever right to require conditions for church membership over and above faith in Christ alone?

- Note that Galatians was probably written before this council (Paul never mentions the council in his letter) ... compare Acts 15:1 and Galatians 2:12 ... and Acts 15:24 these men claimed that James had sent them to propagate their cause ... a lie, this, in an attempt to pit apostles against each other.
- Peter and Barnabas both end up falling to this controversy ... but through Paul, they return to the orthodox position!

Acts 15:6-12 The Council At Jerusalem Peter speaks:

- the Apostles and leaders meet together to discuss the problem
- how many problems to we just let simmer for years ... never attempting a solution?
- Peter left Jerusalem (after his jailing) and James has taken leadership of the church
- is the following statement true: An excellent way of discovering what God would do in a situation is to consider what He has already done?

Acts 15:13-21 James Sums Up:

- Note that James asks the Gentiles restrict their “Christian liberty” in such a way as to be less offensive to practicing Jewish Christians. Are we required to practice voluntary restrictions on our Christian liberty?
- Do I make the Gospel difficult to bear upon those that hear it? (verse 19)
- the list of things to avoid makes reference to “sexual morality” and most likely refers to the list of strange marriages spoken of in Lev. 18 (Greek porneia), as the other three commands are laid out in Leviticus 17.

Acts 15:22-35 The Letter

- The church agrees on a set doctrine and delivers it to the surrounding Christians
- Is there something here to ponder about making our convictions and communications crystal clear?
- there are three points brought out three points:
 - a) separation from those of the circumcision party
 - b) that the body had agreed to send the letter (unity)
 - c) that the spokesmen had the council’s full support

Acts 15:36-41 Paul and Barnabas break company but not fellowship

- this was to begin Paul’s second missionary journey
- Barnabas returns with Mark to his native country
- Is it possible that some people grow better under the leadership of one as opposed to another (see 2Tim. 4:11)
- was it the event in Galatians 2:13 that had already strained the relationship between these two men?
- was this a commendation of the actions of Paul and Barnabas? Who was right and who was wrong?
- To cap this entire teaching, what does it say of Paul that when he met Timothy, he had him circumcised? (See Acts 16:3)

Paul’s Mission In Macedonia: The Second Missionary Trip

- Acts 16:1 - 17:15
- for the first time, the good Seed of the Word is planted in Europe

Acts 16:1-5 Paul Selects His Disciple ... Timothy

- what were the qualifications of this man?
 - a) The parental difference was NOT an issue
 - b) He was spoken well of by the brothers and sisters that knew him
 - c) Willing to go with Paul
 - d) Willing to suffer whatever (circumcision) it took for the Lord
 - this in spite of the fact that it was a non-salvation issue!
 - is it right to freely give up liberties for the Gospel?
 - how have I taken a personal interest in discipling

- note also that Paul had a passion to develop churches, he was also still a pastor and cared for the needs of those churches already established!

Acts 16:6-10 Determining The Will Of The Lord

- God blocks the way ... south west (to Asia), north (Mysia), east (that is where they came from)
- they tried going as far west as they could (Troas) and waited!
 - a) In determining God's will, don't stop trying the logical paths!
 - b) Be willing to see and accept when God closes a door
 - c) If everything closes in front of you, wait and seek His face UNTIL He reveals what He wants
- it is seldom difficult to discover God's will (how many times in the Bible to people really wrestle with this?)
- is there still a place for God speaking through dreams today?
- Consider Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17
- What criteria do we use to determine if a dream is of the Lord?
- consider verse 10 (the word "concluding" implies discussion, debate, CORPORATE debate!)

Acts 16:11-40 In Philippi

- The founding members of the church
 - a) A wealthy business woman (11-15)
 - b) A demonic possessed girl (16-21)
 - why did Paul wait so long to cast out this demon?
 - c) A prison guard (22-40)
 - note that the charge against the men was a lie (truly, it was economic)
- it also was meant to incite racial bigotry and anti-Semitism
- why did God loose the chains of all the prisoners? Why did they not run?
- why did Paul demand his legal rights as a Roman?
- what power is it that unites different members of a culture together in fellowship?
- what lesson can be learned in regards to money and the Gospel? Note that it was not the righteousness of living that was condemned ... rather the intrusion the Gospel made on the financial benefits of occultism.

Acts 17:1-9 The Mission To Thessalonica

- the securities that were taken from Jason were to ensure that the Christians behaved
- Paul had to leave Thessalonica quickly, yet note that he wrote in 1Thess. 1:7-8 - the Gospel had been properly seeded and rooted!

Acts 17: 10 - 15 The Bereans

- what power is there to "examine the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so"?
- note that they combined passionate receptivity with critical questioning! (the term "examine" is the same used of examining a subject on trial - it implies integrity and absence of bias)
- this time, Paul splits up with Timothy and Silas - he is taken to Athens
- note the words used here describing Paul: reasoned, explained, proved, proclaimed, persuaded
- the truest test of a faith (or religion!) is that the facts can be explained, tested and proved with manipulation or control. Our faith survives critical examination

Acts 17: 16 - 34 Paul in Athens

- this city was the intellectual capital of the world (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle)
- beauty that does not honour the Lord can hardly be called beautiful???
- Paul missed the splendor of the city and saw only the religious bankruptcy
- the two dominate philosophies were that of Epicureanism and Stoicism (living for pleasure and living to crucify any passions)
- to the Epicurean mind, the god's were relegated to some different sphere of living - we are on our own

- Timothy and Silas stayed in Berea for a time. Timothy rejoined Paul in Athens for a time, then Paul sent him back to Thessalonica (1Thess. 3:1-2). Silas rejoins Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5)

Paul's Style Of Witnessing:

- 1) Build a bridge to where they are ("I notice the alter to the Unknown God")
 - note also the use of two quotes from pagan poetry
- 2) Leave the condemning words behind!
- 3) Note that there was no fear that the great "philosophies" would dominate his presentation of the Gospel. The Truth will always stand up in argument
- 4) he compliments these people in the largest way that he truthfully can
- 5) The message is specifically geared to the audience
- 6) No Old Testament prophecies are quoted (unknown to these men). Rather the quotes are from pagan poets of his day
- 7) The basic message is that God is a) Creator of all, b) Sustainer of all, c) Judge of all

- Athens was the primary intellectual city in the then-known world
- Does verse 21 describe the modern Christian today? Is ours a message of the mind only?
- It seems that the pagans misunderstood Paul's original message (verse 18 seems to imply that he was preaching two different gods ... Jesus and Resurrection). How do the pagans misunderstand Christians today?
- What kind of "idols to the unknown god" do we have in our culture right now?

Acts 18: 1-17 Paul Moves On To Corinth

- it seemed to be Paul's plan to move from one strategic city center to the next
- It was the center for the worship of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and had a temple with a thousand sacred prostitutes. From the fifth century B.C. on, the verb "to corinthianize" meant to be sexually immoral.
- in 1 Corinthians 2:3, he came in fear, weakness (2Cor. 1:9, even somewhat depressed)
- is it possible that Paul would have preferred a violent, angry reaction to an indifferent, amused one at Athens?
- Who was he waiting for? (1Thess 2:17 – 3-5)
- this city was the commercial capital of the then-known world.
- the meeting of Aquila and Priscilla was timely and it was a friendship that would last a life time
- God's grace is often meted out through our acquaintances
- the banishment by Claudius was perhaps providential
- the gift that Timothy brought (Read Phil. 4:14) allowed Paul to preach full time!
- note that Paul's first convert was a neighbour (literally next door). I wonder why? How did he hear the message? What debate must have he heard through the walls? What did he see to convince him?
- why do you think that Christ spoke to Paul in a vision (verse 9) and why does this seem rare today?
- in verse 17, who beat who? Gentiles beat the Jews (anti-Semitism again!)
- It is possible that this Sosthenes was the same one spoken of in 1Cor. 1:1. What result did this beating have on him (or perhaps his subsequent care)?

Acts 18:18 - 19:41 Paul in Ephesus

- this city was perhaps the religious center of the then-known world
- Paul leaves Aquila and Priscilla there and travels
- why do you think that Aquila and Priscilla "schooled" Apollos in their own home?
- compare 1Corinth. 3:5 when considering the effectiveness of each saint's gifts
- consider 1 Corinth. 16:12 when thinking about the relationship that existed between Paul and Apollos.
- this passage certainly shows that this man was teachable!

Verses 19:1-7

- believers receive both Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- this certainly seems to be subsequent to their new birth
- what was the purpose of the “laying on of hands”?
- what value is there in Paul’s first question, “Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?”

Verses 19:8 - 36

- is verse 11 still a valid form of ministry today? Why did Luke use the word extraordinary?
- in regards to the seven sons of Sceva, what did they lack?
- What does it say to us that the demons knew the name of Paul?
- What is the value in a public burning (verse 19). Ephesus was known for its sale of books devoted to the practices of witchcraft
- the drachmas was about a day’s wage for the average worker

- note that Paul sends Timothy and Erastus ahead (to Corinth) to collect the offering that was being taken for the saints of Jerusalem (verses 21-22). Paul would swing back there, but his vision was on to Rome, then Spain. What is the value of having a vision?

The City Riot

- is it not intriguing to you that the riot began after Paul had sent away two of his closest companions? What value there is in fellowship together with like believers!
- The argument of Demetrius was purely economic, although he couches it in three other “patriotic” statements:
 - 1) The name of the trade union would be tarnished
 - 2) The temple would lose prestige
 - keep in mind that this temple also acted as a bank!
 - 3) The goddess would be thought of as less majestic
 - does verse 32 speak to us in any way? How many people have really made a decision for Christ one way or another based on the FACTS? Many don’t believe because they don’t know to believe! How does that change your evangelistic approach?
- what kind of thinking was going on in Paul’s mind as he planned to enter the arena? Was it God’s will for him to do that?
- the theatre, still standing today ... can hold 25 000 people
- what does verse 37 say regarding Paul’s defense of the Gospel. Did he spend time blasting cults or preaching Jesus?
- what was the value in friendship with the “officials of the province”
- Note that Paul never presented the Gospel in a “take it or leave it” manner ... he reasoned with the people ... well thought out, persuasive arguments ... which he himself passionately believed.
- Paul spent a year and a half at Corinth (18:11) and three years at Ephesus (20:31) ... do we quit too early?

- Consider a possible schedule for Paul in Ephesus:

- a) He rented a hall from one Tyrannus
- b) Typically in this culture (Ionian), the day would begin at sun rise, and continue until 11:00am, when people would break due to the heat of the day. There were possibly more people sleeping at 1:00pm than 1:00am!
- c) The day would pick up again at about 4:00pm and would continue until sunset.
- d) There is some evidence that would suggest that Paul preached during these hours (5 hours a day) ... six days a week (not on the Sabbath) for three years!

- Evangelism must be:

- a) less ecclesiastical (more than simply inviting them to church)
- b) less emotional (make a decision without knowledge)
- c) less superficial (connect with the people on a deeper basis)

Acts 20: 1-12

The raising of Eutychus

- Paul had planned on going to Macedonia where he had sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him (19:22). He had stopped at Troas (see 2Corinthians 2:12), found an open door, but no peace since Titus was not found there. He left. What does this teach us? He did not catch up with Titus until (probably Philippi) ... see 2Corinth. 7:5-16
- the large number of leaders probably indicates that they were carrying their respective offerings for the church at Jerusalem ... a program that Paul had been running for two years
- some elements of an early church service
- it was on a Sunday; it involved communion and a sermon
- why did the church service continue after the raising of this lad?

Acts 20:13-38

Paul addresses the leaders of the church at Ephesus

- why do you think (in light of what Paul was now preparing to do) that Paul chose to walk the lonely path from Troas to Assos, especially after preaching all night?
- Ephesus was 30 miles north of Miletus
- what follows is the only message in the book of Acts delivered to Christians
- In verses 18-21, Paul attempts to remind the elders of his sincerity, based on their knowledge of his actions (i.e. you know ...)
- In verses 22 -27, Paul speaks of his future sufferings
- note that the "You know" verses are now replaced with "I know"
- Finally, he exhorts the elders (verses 28-38)
- Paul warns ... then trusts God to protect and grow this church

- Some thoughts from this passage:

- a) My sincerity will not be based on my words, but my visible actions
- b) Paul's ministry was personal (from house to house ... verse 20)
- c) Resolve to do the work of the Lord can become more important than even physical protection (Verses 23-24)
- d) I must be watchful over me (verse 28) before I can be used of the Lord over others
- e) Divisions are always a potential in our midst (verses 29-30)
 - refuting error is an unpopular thing these days ... why?
- f) Several times Paul speaks of his own example ... perhaps example is a better teacher of truth than anything! "Preach the Gospel at all times ... if necessary, use words!"
- g) The church is not ours ... but God's (verses 28-29) ... do you see the Trinity in these verses?

Consider Richard Baxter's quote (1656)

" ... Oh then, let us hear these arguments of Christ, whenever we find ourselves growing dull and careless: ' Did I die for them, and wilt not thou look after them? Were they worth my blood and they are not worth thy labour? Did I come down from heaven to earth to seek and save that which was lost, and wilt not thou go to the next door or street or village to seek them? How small is thy labour and condescension as to mine? I debased myself to this, but it is thy honour to be so employed. Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation, and was I willing to make thee a co-worker with me, and will thou refuse that little that lieth upon thy hand?'"

Acts 21:1-16

On To Jerusalem

- How can we reconcile the fact that "through the Spirit" (verse 4), Paul was instructed not to go forward, yet it seems to be God's will that he indeed go to Jerusalem (Acts 18:21, 19:21, 20:16, 20:22)?
 - a) We must draw a distinction between a prediction and a prohibition
 - b) Also, draw a distinction between what the Spirit says and how people react to the message
- Verse 4 implies that they looked for Christian disciples to stay with.
- Why have Christians abandoned public prayers (21:5)?
- Was Agabus' prophecy a correct one (see 21:11)?
- Note the number of times Paul is encouraged by the saints he visits ... they fortify him on this journey.

Acts 21:17-26 Paul In Jerusalem ... Partakes In A Jewish Ceremony

- Is it possible to go overboard with the doctrine of "being all things to all men" (1Corinth. 9:22)
- Is it possible that the Apostles were having trouble discipling the Jewish converts (20-22)
- The four other men were completing a Nazirite vow.
- Do you think that Paul was in agreement with the plan?
- The fruit of this plan was the jailing of Paul. Did the Apostles miss the will of God here?
- Do you think that Paul held bitterness towards the church for the execution of this plan?
- According to William Barclay, "There is a time that compromise is a sign of strength, not weakness". Agree?

Acts 21:27 - 40 Paul Is Arrested

- It is not a coincident that Acts starts in Jerusalem and end in Rome. The purpose Luke has in sharing this history is to show that the Jews became increasing hostile to the Gospel and the Gentiles became warmer.
- How often are disasters propagated because of assumption (Acts 21:29)?
- What does the gate being shut symbolize (39)
- Why did Paul desire to speak to the people? What does that tell us when we face hardships? What would God have us do? Why did not Paul tell the Roman guard immediately that he was a Roman citizen?
- It seems that the Roman law (at this time, anyway), was a friend to the Gospel. Why is it important to fight (in our culture) for the continued right to proclaim the Gospel. Does this help us to "pick our battles" more carefully?
- It is interesting that in both the case of Jesus and Paul, that nothing was found in the law to warrant their treatment!
- Paul is desperate to bring reconciliation to the Jewish and Gentile Christians ... through both the events of the Temple and the offering he collected (see 24: 17)
- Where might Peter and James have been at this moment? Were they around, could they have helped appease the crowds?
- Why is it some people always assume the negative (the Jews) and some people always assume the positive - or at least openness (Claudius Lysias)?

Acts 22:1-22 Paul's Defense Before The Jewish Crowds

- Paul speaks in Aramaic (the ancient tongue)
- When Paul mentions the Gentiles (verse 22), in the context of his message, he is ultimately saying that the Jews and the Gentiles are equal ... all must come to the Father by the same path (Jesus). The Jews considered this an abomination
- Verses 17 - 19 ...sometimes we think that our testimony will surely communicate the truth we want to convey ... yet the Lord knows that some will reject even this!

Acts 22:30 - 23:10 Paul's First Trial

- the Sanhedrin is gathered to bring accusation against him
- it must be noted that they could not bring one witness who would claim that they saw a gentile beyond the Court Of The Gentiles. Had they, this would have been punishable by death
- when Paul is struck, it was a violation of the Law. His retort could be interpreted as "I could not accept that the person in the position of High Priest" could act this way" ... none the less, he apologized. True or false ... God is as concerned with how we handle the aftermath of our sin, as He is to ensure we don't sin at all? (A second possibility ... Paul could not see the person who spoke due to poor eye sight ... see Gal. 4:13, 6:11)
- is Paul's question (verse 6) a fair one? A true one? Or is he simply trying to split the trial on the basis of a single doctrinal point?
- note that in verse 9, they refuse to entertain the idea that the Lord spoke to Paul!
- Why was it necessary for the Lord to appear to Paul (verse 11)?

Acts 23:11-35 Paul Is Sent To Felix

- note that verse 27 puts the best possible spin on the actions of the commander!
- it is important to note that the hand of God (through Paul's nephew) can most times be seen in the light of ordinary circumstances! How often do we miss seeing the hand of God?

Acts 24:1-27 Paul's Second Trial - Before Governor Felix

- Paul would spend the next two years Caesarea
- What do you think the Jerusalem church did for Paul? Was their silence at his trials revealing to you? Each time Paul had come to the city, trouble had broken out.
- verses 24-25 seem to indicate a Holy Ghost conviction in the man. Note that Paul preached on "self-control" (verse 25). Felix was married to Drusilla (she was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, whose death we studied in Acts 12). She was his third wife - she was 16 years old when he enticed her away from her former husband by promising her many rich delights
- finally, Porcius Festus takes over from Felix. Felix was called to trial in AD59 for the poor management of the affairs of Israel
- do I take great pains to have a clear conscience before God and men (24:16)?
- it could be that the large offering raised for the church in Jerusalem enticed Felix to expect a large bride for the release of Paul.

Acts 25: 1-12 Paul's Third Trial - Before Governor Festus

- Paul, apparently stuck between two bad choices, chooses to appeal to Caesar (verse 11). This would guarantee him his desire to go to Rome.
- Do you think that Paul would attempt to win even Nero to Christ?

Acts 25:13-26:32 Paul's Fourth Trial Before Agrippa II

- This man was son to Agrippa I and great grandson to Herod The Great. Bernice was his sister Herod The Great ... slaughtered the babies in Bethlehem
- Antipas (his son) ... Beheaded John the Baptist
- Agrippa (grandson) ... killed James, the son of Zebedee by the sword
- Festus needs to write the charges (verse 25:26-27), Agrippa II knows the Jewish history (26:3)
- Does 26:20 shed light on the value of Living Like A Christian?
- Note that Festus recognizes Paul's intelligence (26:24) - Agrippa knows that when Paul mentions the Old Testament prophecies, that he is correct - he is strangely silent here!
- Paul forces him to either agree with the OT or disagree (verses 27 and 28)
- in verse 7, Paul mentions "our 12 tribes" ... can it be said that ten have them have been lost?
- Note that in these trials, Paul has not only been a defendant, but also a Witness to the Gospel. He makes no attempts to ingratiate himself with pomp and power - he maintains integrity through-out the long process of trials. His message never changes!
- Count also, the number of times that Paul uses his personal testimony! He tailors it to each audience by emphasizing certain areas - but it is his major tool of evangelism!
- There are many injustices done in the world today. What can we do to help alleviate one of them?

Acts 27:1 - 28:30 On To Rome

- note that Luke accompanied Paul on the Journey (another "we" section of the book)
- note how quickly Paul won the goodwill of the guard (verses 27:3-6). What does this say of the man's character?
- Since the day of the fast (Day Of Atonement) was in early October, travel on the Mediterranean was increasing dangerous.
- How is it that Luke and Aristarchus were allowed to travel with Paul? Either they too were fellow prisoners (unlikely as they are never mentioned as such) or else they **traveled as Paul's slaves!**
- the fast (verse 9) was the Day Of Atonement ... early October
- note the five things that the crew (plus Paul, it seems) did to try to make the best of the situation:

- a) brought the life boat up onto the deck of the ship
- b) lashed cables under her hull
- c) the lowered the sea anchor to act as a brake
- d) jettisoned cargo
- e) finally, they jettisoned any spare tackle that they could
- Paul is portrayed here, not as a great church leader and apostle, but as a simple Christian among some 276 unbelievers
- note that in his address, he remains hopeful and godly
 - a) he encouraged them (verse 22)
 - b) he testified as to what the Lord had told him (verse 24)
 - what can be said of the call to stay together (verse 30-31)
- what kind of influence did Paul have on the Centurion (to lose a prisoner could have cost him his life) ... see verse 43
- why did Paul ask the blessing on the meal (verse 35)

The ministry of angels to us

- according to Hebrews 1:14, they minister to human beings by:
 - a) Giving instructions (Acts 8:26) ... ensure that these instructions are exactly in the will of the Lord without contradicting His Word
 - b) Reveal God's glory (Rev. 1:1-3)
 - c) To announce judgment (Daniel 5:25-27)
 - d) To strengthen (Matthew 4:11, Luke 22:42-43 - the word strengthen here, means to make strong inwardly!)
 - e) Protection 2Kings 6:14-17)
 - f) By observing us and promoting the will of the Lord (1Corinthians 4:9)

Angels Are Tools Of Judgment

- see Hebrews 1:7
- they warn of Judgment in Genesis 18
- they bring judgment in 2Kings 19, 1 Chron. 21:16, Acts 12:22, Exodus 12:18-30 and Revelation
- The Lord will assign angels to separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25)
- note that Hell was created for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41)
- angels will be used to gather people (see Matthew 13:41-42, Matthew 24:40)

Angelic Power Over Us

- Give no opportunity to the devil (Ephesians 4:27)
- Be sober and vigilant (1 Peter 5:9)
- resist (James 4:7)

Acts 27:2-20

- how is it that Aristarchus and Luke were able to travel with Paul? Some have suggested that they went as his slaves. It is also true that they may have been fellow prisoners.
- what can be said of Paul's amazing ability to befriend people? Is this a spiritual gift that we should seek for?
- the trip that they proposed from Crete (Fair Havens) to Phoenix was only 40 miles and the gentle, southern breeze deceived them.
- when the storm hit, they did five things to attempt to save themselves:
 - a) hauled the life board onto the ship
 - b) "frapped" the vessel with cords or straps around the hull
 - c) either they lowered the mainsail or dropped a sea anchor to slow themselves
 - d) they jettisoned cargo
 - e) they threw out any tackle or ship equipment they could

- does God expect us to expend our energy to do all that we can to make a difficult situation better? Are there some things that we should not do to make our lives (or situations) better or easier?
- during the storm, what do you think that Paul's outlook on things might have been? Consider Phil 1:20 and Acts 27:10.

Acts 27:21-38 Paul Intervenes

- Paul refuses to gloat! His first message is "Take Courage". What message do people see in us on a daily basis?
- His second message is "Stay together in unity". Is unity in the church something to be strived for? How would that be personally fleshed out by you?
- His third message is to "take food". This is an incredibly practical advice. How practical are Christians today in terms of what the world sees? What does the fact that Paul makes a public show of his "prayer of thanksgiving" mean to you. What would an unsaved person think if they heard you pray out loud?
- John Stott makes the statement that Paul was a "... man of God and a man of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense". Do you agree? Does this make his witness more attractive?
- Why would God spare all the prisoners (who were going to Rome to die in the Arena anyway)?

Acts 28:1-10 Paul on Malta

- Again we see Paul as a practical man who gathered fire wood
- Note that he did not "handle the snake", but rather this was an unprovoked attack.
- What can we say of snake handler?
- See the fickleness of people who jump to conclusions ... first a murderer then a god
- One wonders why they were invited into the house of the governor and lavished with blessings?

Acts 28:11-16 Finally To Rome

- Do you think that Julius was treated to the same hospitality (by the Christians) as was Paul?
- Do you think that Paul was ministered to by these Christians? How?
- Why do you think that Julius never lost a single prisoner?

Acts 28:17-23 Paul's Final Presentation

- Once again, the same response ... the group of Jews is split into two camps!
- in the next two years, many would be converted, including a runaway slave named Onesimus! He would also write Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, Philemon and 2 Timothy
- assuming Nero heard the Gospel (Acts 27:24), would Paul have had this chance had he not been a prisoner (Phil 1:12)?
- Why was the book of Acts never "finished"?

What Happens Next?

- we don't know!
- some argue that at the end of the two years, Paul is simply executed because he was found guilty of disturbing the peace of the Roman provinces
- others argue that Paul was set free and had one more missionary trip. He was then recaptured during Nero's persecution of the Christians (AD 64) - after the fire in Rome, which he blamed on Christians. He was then beheaded, just after writing 2 Timothy

Final Reflections

What kind of man was Paul?

- impressive neither in speech nor appearance (2 Corinthian 10:10)
- some kind of debilitating physical illness (Galatians 4:13, 2Corinth. 12:7-10)

- a man of passion (either for Jewish things or Christian things)
- grammatically, his style is odd:
 - a) he often used a scribe to write his epistles
 - b) he often, in the midst of a thought, moves quickly down a sub thought, never returning to his initial sentence - his writing is hard to follow at times
- he delighted in the fellowship of other Christians and he easily made friends
- his converts were his “pride and joy” ... mixing strong warnings with tender forgiveness and encouragement
- he saw no limits to the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ
- he passionately “trained” his own body such that he might live what he believed (1 Corinthians 9:19-27) ... and others would see it!

George Went Hensley (May 2, 1881 – July 25, 1955) was an American [Pentecostal](#) minister best known for popularizing the practice of [snake handling](#). A native of rural [Appalachia](#), Hensley experienced a religious conversion around 1910: on the basis of his interpretation of scripture, he came to believe that the [New Testament](#) commanded all Christians to handle venomous snakes.

Hensley was part of a large family that had moved between [Tennessee](#) and [Virginia](#), before settling in Tennessee shortly after his birth. Following his conversion, he traveled through the [Southeastern United States](#), teaching a form of Pentecostalism that emphasized strict personal holiness and frequent contact with venomous snakes. Although illiterate, he became a licensed minister of the [Church of God \(Cleveland, Tennessee\)](#) in 1915. After traveling through Tennessee for several years conducting Church of God-sanctioned services, he resigned from the denomination in 1922. Hensley was married four times and fathered thirteen children. He had many conflicts with his family members because of his drunkenness, frequent travels, and inability to earn steady income, factors cited by his first three wives as reasons for their divorces.

Hensley was arrested in Tennessee on [moonshine](#)-related charges during the [Prohibition](#) era and sentenced to a term in a workhouse, from which he escaped and fled the state. Hensley traveled to [Ohio](#), where he held [revival services](#), though he and his family rarely stayed long in one location. He established churches, known as the [Church of God with Signs Following](#), in Tennessee and [Kentucky](#). His services ranged from small meetings held in houses to large gatherings that drew media attention and hundreds of attendees. Although he conducted many services, he made little money, and he was arrested for violating laws against snake handling at least twice. During his ministry, Hensley claimed to have been bitten by many snakes without ill effect, and toward the end of his career, he estimated that he had survived more than 400 bites. In 1955, while conducting a service in Florida, he was bitten by a snake and became violently ill. He refused to seek medical attention and died the following day. Despite his personal failings, he convinced many residents of rural Appalachia that snake handling was commanded by God, and his followers continued the practice after his death. Although snake handling developed independently in several Pentecostal ministries, Hensley is generally credited with spreading the custom in the Southeastern United States.

Here are some main disciplines of abstinence and engagement that have been helpful to Christ-followers over the centuries.

Disciplines of Abstinence (Self-Denial)

These are ways of denying ourselves something we want or need in order to make space to focus on and connect with God.

Solitude: Refraining from interacting with other people in order to be alone with God and be found by him. (Solitude is completed by silence.)

Silence: Not speaking in a quiet place in order to quiet our minds and whole self and attend to God's presence. Also, not speaking so that we can listen to others and bless them.

Fasting: Going without food (or something else) for a period of intense prayer — the fast may be complete or partial.

Sabbath: Doing no work to rest in God's person and provision; praying and playing with God and others. (God designed this for one day a week. We can practice it for shorter periods too.)

Secrecy: Not making our good deeds or qualities known to let God or others receive attention and to find our sufficiency in God alone.

Submission: Not asserting ourselves in order to come under the authority, wisdom, and power of Jesus Christ as our Lord, King, and Master. (If you think of this as submitting to a person as unto Christ then it's a discipline of engagement.)

Disciplines of Engagement (Christ in Community)

These are ways of connecting with God and other people, conversing honestly with them in order to love and be loved.

Bible Reading: Trusting the Holy Spirit-inspired words of Scripture as our guide, wisdom, and strength for life.

Worship: Praising God's greatness, goodness, and beauty in words, music, ritual, or silence.

Prayer: Conversing with God about what we're experiencing and doing together. (As we see in the Lord's Prayer the main thing we do in prayer is to make requests of our Father for one another.)

Soul Friendship: Engaging fellow disciples of Jesus in prayerful conversation or other spiritual practices.

Personal Reflection: Paying attention to our inner self in order to grow in love for God, others, and self.

Service: Humbly serving God by overflowing with his love and compassion to others, especially those in need.

Further Notes:

Acts 14:

Ovid tells another story in *Metamorphoses* VIII about an old couple, Baucis and Philemon, who were the only ones in the town to invite the disguised gods, Zeus (Greek)/Jupiter (Roman) and Hermes/Mercury, into their home even though they were much poorer than their neighbors. They were taken up to a mountain by the gods, who flooded the town once they were safe, and their house was transformed into a temple. They were made the guardians of the temple, and were also granted their request to die at the same time as the other. When they did die, they were transformed into a pair of intertwining trees, one oak and one linden.