

## A God of Action

*Acts 1:1*

*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach*

*Acts 2:1-2*

*When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.*

## Recap

We started last week looking at the book of Acts and The Mission of the Church and The character and passion of the early Christians.

I stated that I was struck by the fact that the people of the early church seemed to me to know 3 things very clearly.

1. They knew their God
2. They knew what they believed
3. They knew what they were called to do

In other words they knew their **mission**.

- They knew who they were.
- They knew whom they were serving.
- They knew what they were supposed to be doing.

There is real confusion today about the Christian church.

About her nature, her task, her message.

There seems to me to be real confusion in the heat of many Christians today. They seem caught between two worlds, unsure of their stance before heaven and sure of their role on earth.

The bible describes a Christian as an alien, a pilgrim as a person who is just passing through this life on the way to a better life.

I do not get that sense anymore when I talk to people.

Today I get a sense that even the most dedicated Christian is fighting for the piece of the Pie that they have taken their eye off THE prize

## **Introduction**

Yet here we find Luke writing this stirring account of a group of people who were different. Here we see Luke's account of a group of people who were not committed to the thought of changing the world – they were actually changing the world they were living in.

I suppose most of us would read this letter and not think too much of the date of the writing. I know that is a habit of familiarity I have to break. I have to stop myself and constantly coach myself into thinking about who is writing and who they are writing to.

I suppose we could read this book and think of Luke writing it as if he is walking along beside Paul – a bit like a weblog or Apostolic Reality TV “live and in color from around the wall”.

But no,

That is not how it happened

The book of Acts is written as a reflective historical account by Luke of a group of people who followed the teachings of a man they called the Messiah, the long awaited prophet promised to the Children of Israel. These people had become known as Christians.

Luke mentions even that fact.

These people who were known first as Jews, were now following some old teacher or old religion. These People, they were talking about, living, experiencing something totally new and different.

They had a new revelation. And they were growing in number and influence. In the gentile – that is none Jewish city of Antioch, they had begun to be such a force that they were no longer called Nazarenes or Galileans (the region that their original master was from) because

now this faith was spreading all over the region, all over the world... Luke says:, *I can remember the day when Paul and I ...we first heard the name Christians when we were visiting Antioch.*

The book of Acts is a very personal account of a man and his friends and their journey together as they watched the world in their day change before their eyes under the influence and power of Jesus Christ.

You see Luke penned the letter between 62 AD and 70 AD, some even say later. The things he is talking about stated some 40 years before this date.

Luke is looking back over the first 40 or 50 years of church history. James, Phillip, Bartholomew and Matthew had all been killed. Peter was in prison and awaiting execution.

Paul was in prison and John was exiled as an old man to the island of Patmos.

Yet this movement, these people seemed to allow nothing to hinder them.

They were so passionate, so motivated and so committed.

## **A God of Action**

And Luke is sitting back, having completed his first letter, the history of this man called the Christ, the son of the living God, he now starts to write an account of the movement, of this thing that Jesus called the church.

He starts off by saying, "All that Jesus began to do and to teach." – that is all that Jesus **began**.

All He has **done** and All that He shall **do**.

You see friend God is a God of Action.  
Our God is a God of Action, life and movement

Luke starts that way and says that in the very first verses in his recap of Jesus' life.

Now we came to this second chapter, a chapter that in a very real sense is the start of the church proper.

*Acts 2:1-2*

*When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.*

**A) The first thing I notice here about the early church is that the start of the church was a supernatural start.**

“And suddenly there came from heaven...”

And political and community influences

You see for me, this is an insightful statement.

This reveals to me the true nature and character of the true church – it is supernatural.

The early church was not full of the sorts of people that we are now told should be running churches.

*Acts 4:13*

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*

Two things marked the early churches leaders:

- 1) What they seemed to lack
- 2) The fact that they had been with Jesus

The modern church leaders seem to me to be marked by two things:

1. What they seemed to have
2. The fact that they **don't** seem to have been with Jesus

To suggest that marketing, programs, facilities, influences are the things that are needed to start or build a church seem not only ludicrous but frivolous and it flies in the face of all that was present at the start of the early church.

These early follows had none of the so called credentials for successful ministry, yet their impact was heard around the world

*Acts 17:6*

*“These men who have turned the world upside down”.*

The sign that the church is active and alive in its community, is not that it is popular, but it is impactful and ‘present.’

It is a felt presence.

It is a force.

It is known not by its artwork but by its people

Remember these people died for their faith, they were out to save the world, not run for congress.

How could these religious, uneducated men in their lifetime change their world?

Well it wasn’t because of what they did, but because of what God did in them.

If you hear nothing else from me to day...hear this...

*It was not about what they did for God that made them great, it was what God did for them that made them passionate.*

And that is the essential message of the Christian.

That is the essential message of the church.

What God did was supernatural not superficial.

“Jesus began to do...”

“Suddenly there came from heaven...”

## **B) Christianity is not a dead religion.**

The greatest enemy of true Christianity has always been religion.

Religion (def): A set of beliefs including a moral code, devotions and ritual observances.

People would be right to reject Christianity if it was a religion.

But it is not.  
It never has been.

Christianity is not a national day of prayer.  
It is not a political party.  
It is not someone you vote for.

Christianity is not what the media says it is.  
Christianity is not good works accomplished by great men.  
Christianity is not a day of the week, an obligation that we feel toward Sunday, because that is how we were raised.  
Christianity is not a building, a ritual or a form  
Christianity is alive, it is passion, it is burden, it is hands lifted and hearts open wide passionately surrendering to Christ

Did you notice I said “Christ” not “God”? A lot of people will say they are serving God. That is different than being surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Any notion that Christianity is something we do is utterly wrong.

We may do things because we are Christians.

But doing certain things does not make us a Christian.

We must shed the idea that Christianity and the church is dependent and built upon something external to us.

All over our nation today, there are large numbers of people going to church out of a sense of obligation or duty. Hoping that it will be fun, that the kids won't be bored that they will be entertained and the service won't be too long.

Each week feeling nothing, not being moved in their soul or convicted, in their spirits.

Then there is the other group, who also have no concept of church, who have their religion based upon lively emotion, songs of self, and preaching stunts to help woo and entertain them.

That is not church, not the real church. And the reality is that it makes no difference whatsoever to their lives.

Am I saying that Christianity and real church should be boring, long and dry and distasteful...no...we have all gone to those churches and I would rather eat broken glass than go back there again.

Christ, Church, Christianity made a difference in the lives of these early believers and as a result of what happened in them, they were compelled to do something about it!

Christianity is felt. In fact if you are not moved to tears on occasion at the true worship of God, then you must examine the state of your soul.

If you never find yourself convicted by the word then you must examine your heart.

### **3. True Christianity is always an activity of God.**

“Jesus began to do and teach...”

“Suddenly there came from heaven...”

Anything controlled by us whether lively or lifeless is not Christianity.

Christianity is that which *controls us*,  
Not that which we control.

It is not an unknown force, it is not an unfamiliar voice, it is not something we unwillingly or unknowingly submit to.

No, it is exactly the opposite and this brings me to my next point.

### **C) Christianity is not the worship of an unknown God.**

The Christians of the book of Acts were surrounded by unknown Gods, unknown forces that shaped and terrorized the lives of those people who served them

The gods of religion are an unknown force – they are Impersonal and unapproachable.

Gods who can neither be appeased nor approached. They are irrational, angry all the time or over emotional sappy and weak.

This is the sort of gods, the gentiles worship.

You cannot pray to such a God.  
You cannot worship or depend upon such a God.

The God who is painted as either devoid of emotions or over emotional is unreliable.

We have to stop allowing the influences of our day to define our world for us, just like the influences of the ancient world defined theirs. Do not take your view of Christ from Christians, but from Christ Himself.

Culture should never dictate the role of the church in society or the role of Christ in your life.

Your Christianity, your church should be the galvanizing ingredient in every area of our community.

**D) Christianity and an true encounter with God always  
compels people up and forward, not inward and backward**

*Acts 26:14-17*

We read here an account of the conversion of the Apostle Paul

It is an encounter that started with repentance and introspection but ended in a life time of action and service.

The early church had a sense about it that it was an active duty.

All of the early Christians lived their life like this,

They lived like they were called to engage the enemy, not allow the enemies to overwhelm them.

They did not allow their past to disqualify them or hold them back from fully engaging in the call and mission of the church.

I meet people all the time that use their past as an excuse for not moving forward.

These people were not raised as Christians, by Christians. They lived in cities whose religion was the worship of sex goddesses.

If you feel that having an abortion disqualifies you from serving God, then what do we do about the woman who are being saved in Russia? The average Russian woman has had 11 abortions in her life time? What do we do about the Christian parents in China getting saved who are commanded by state law to only have one child and therefore kill all their little girls because they are more expensive to raise than boys.

Let me just set the record straight; God does not live in Southlake or Keller or modern America. His major concerns do not include cosmetic dentistry or botox. His major concern is not your womb trama, but you future. You don't need inner healing –you need to get a vision for life.

This is not an issue of culture, but of life transformation.

### **The example of the life of Paul**

We read here in the account of the conversation of Paul the experience that seems to have been common in the early church.

The first words that Jesus said to Paul were words that challenged:  
His beliefs  
His lifestyle and  
His behavior.

All true encounters with Christ affect those 3 areas of a person's life.

The early Christians were not motivated by regret but repentance.  
They were not caught in their sin, but convicted of them.

They were not enhancing their lifestyle but submitting to His Lordship.

*Acts 26:14-17*

*And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*

Now after this revelation of who Jesus really is in a universal sense, we notice 4 things that happened in the life of Paul, Four challenges that are brought by Jesus to Paul and four things that Paul has to come to terms with

*16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you*

## 1) He was told to get on with it.

v16: ***“Now get up.....***

The God of all requires more than bowing and groveling.

He demands that after an encounter with Him you ***get up....***

All true encounters with Christ start with repentance and end in action

If ever there was a man who should have done penitents, who should have lived his life in shame and fear of God it was Paul. A man who needed inner healing and therapy, it was Paul.

After years of telling people Jesus was a lie, a fake, a phony.  
After years of persecution and killing Christians,  
Jesus appears to Paul.

Christ's first words are words of compassion, telling Paul that it must be tough for him to fight against the true revelation that is burning in his heart.

We have all fought that. The sense of lost years and 'what if's' if we had only surrendered earlier on instead of kicking against the calling

But notice Jesus doesn't speak of Paul's past, just his future.

He does talk of what Paul had done, just the great things he will do.

As human beings we all came to Christ broken and we need to all leave whole.

No inner healing, no ministry retreats for burnt out Christians.

Just an overwhelming sense of a second chance and a desire – not obligation, religion has obligations to do something with it.

## 2) The second thing we notice here in the life of Paul:

16 *Now get up and **stand on your feet.***

**Stand:** be immovable before others, before opposition.

**Your feet:** you do this Paul, your decision, your opportunity, your future.

God took Paul into Arabia for 14 years.

Maybe it took him that long to understand grace.

Maybe it took him that long to get over the incredible guilt and shame.

Maybe it took that long for it to be reasonably safe for him to preach.

But whatever happened – he came back and he was standing on his feet

Take your time if you must but friend understand, that is what is required of you.

They are your feet and you have to

Get up on them

And you have to stand on them.

You have to let go of your past and embrace you future

## 3) The third thing you notice here is that everyone is saved for a purpose

***V16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose***

Your salvation was not accidental, it was not random, and it was and is purposeful.

Everyone bodies salvation is purposeful and a process

God's purpose is to put you in the process of refinement and sanctification.

When God first saves a person he started to talk with them, and challenge them.

He convicts you about your character, about your priorities, about your motives about the hidden agenda and idols in your life.

All of the time leading you from Faith to Faith (Romans 1:17) because that is how righteous people live.

If your problem is **selfishness** He is going to give you a wife and kids and say “now sort that out! Die to self.” Because it is about character.

If your problem is **pride** He is going to let your enemies get promoted ahead of you and say “Pray for them that persecute you”.

If it is **covetousness** he is going to say, “Give it all away first, then we talk about you starting you Multinational Corporation”.

If it is **idolatry** he is going to do what ever it takes to rip that thing from your life and soul – because He will have no other god before Him

You be faithful in this here little request and then we will graduate you.

#### **4) The next thing I notice in the life of Paul is that true salvation starts with serving and ends in witnessing**

*v 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,*

Jesus says to Paul “...*what you have seen and what I will show you.*”

When a person first responds to the drawing of the Holy Ghost to salvation....

When they first respond to the calling of their heart to repentance

This isn't the final thing.

This isn't the total thing.

This is a starting point.

As time comes by,

As you learn to walk with God, in humility, justice and mercy, a relationship develops. Based upon this relationship, revelation comes.

Jesus says to Paul what you have seen of me up to this point - I want you to serve.

**What you have seen of me – serve.**

*Acts 26:15-16 ESV*

*(15) And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am **Jesus** whom you are persecuting.*

*(16) But rise and stand upon your feet, for **I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,***

The first revelation, that must come to any person is that he is to serve Christ and no other!

It does not matter to who Christ appears; the requirement is the same every time.

Be it King or Commoner,

Prince or Pauper,

General or Janitor

Someone destined to business or the pulpit, the requirement and the expectations are the same.

***“I am Jesus...”***

Christ will reveal Himself to you.

Based upon this revelation He will require service from you.

Christ’s role and importance in your life is not negotiable.

An act of obedience is called an act of obedience because you do what you are told and not what you want.

Submission is not submission till it is submission.

If you have seen Him for who he truly is then you will become committed to serving him.

More than that....

*A true revelation of Christ does not just reveal who He truly is, but reveals who you truly are.*

You not only see the splendor and majesty of an all powerful God, but you become overwhelmed with love and gratitude with the fact that you have been saved from a life lived in sin. A life bound for hell, a life lived below potential and an existence in a Christ-less Eternity.

You see yourself for who you really are and you are overcome with the gratitude of one saved from hell and rescued from damnation....

This brings me to the next expectation that Christ has of all Christians

**What I will show you – be a witness to.**

*15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.*

*16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant **and as a witness** of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.*

*(Acts 26:15-16, NIV).*

The call to be a witness is the first proving ground for the issue of Lordship.

Will we bear witness to all He has done and all that He has become in our life to the world?

The person who is unsure of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done will be unsure and uncertain as to what to say, what to do and where to go and how to act around other people because for them it is an issue of behavior not conviction.

You are not a witness until you have evidence

*Acts 1:8 ESV*

*(8) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

We are called by Christ Himself, empowered by His Holy Spirit to be a witness all over the earth as to *who* He is and *what* He has done.

We only qualify as a witness because we have evidence.

If we have no evidence, then we do not qualify.

Evidence is a token, a sign, that Jesus is who He says HE is and can do what He says HE can do.

If you are unable to bear witness for Christ, then I challenge you to asses what He has done in your life lately that would pass as evidence to the fact that you are a Christian.

Can you witness to a change in your life?

Moving from sorrow to joy

From fear to peace

From stress to trust?

From bitterness to forgiveness

Or do you live under a cloud of intimidation and negativity?

Is your soul prospering or bankrupt?

We will endeavor to look at all these issues in the coming weeks.

**5) The final thing I notice here and it marks all the conversions of the people of the early church is they had a sense of being sent ones.**

*17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you*

Paul was sent

He was commissioned

He had a task

He was to bring a living Jesus to a dying world

This was not optional

This was essential

What started with receiving ends in giving

As Christ gave his life for these early Christians, He required the same in return.

Friend you have been given the greatest gift that any person has ever received – the gift of eternal life – freely you have received – freely give!