

**“The Movement of God”**  
**August 21, 2022**  
**Acts Part 2, Week 1**

And we are back in the book of Acts! For those of you who weren't here with us, at the start of the year we started a teaching series in the book of Acts. Then we took the summer break from teaching it. And now we're back in it today - and I'll go ahead and say we're gonna do something a bit different this morning. Rather than look at a specific text in Acts - what I want to do is provide a recap for us since it's been so long, to help remind us why this book is so important for us as a church.

Among other things Acts is going to show us

- What it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit - God's empowering presence that is actually with us and in us..
- What it means to proclaim and share the gospel with those around us.
- What it looks like to actually *be* the church, and follow Jesus alongside a family of other believers.
- And what to expect as the church - the adversity and how to suffer well for the faith
- Alongside seeing how God gets the glory in all of it...

To even connect it to last week, Acts is going to help answer the question: how do we as the people of God learn to live into the story of God? Like, what happens when people who are so committed to God's Word to meditate on it and obey then commit to one another and become family together?

What you get is a movement of God that has the power to push back the darkness, to fight against injustice, and ultimately usher in the Kingdom of God. And now we get to be a part of it.

And I would argue that's what the book of Acts is all about. Where we get to see up close and personal just how the people of God practically lived out living this story together and what this means for us - and how it invites us all of us into further meaning and purpose, some 2,000 years removed from the story.

To begin with, we're actually going to start with Luke. So if you have a Bible, I'd invite you to turn to Luke 24:44-49.

As you're turning there, why start in Luke? Luke is part 1 of a two-part story. Acts is written by Luke, so Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke, written by the same author to the same person. And all of the themes and ideas that Luke talks about in his gospel all connect to themes and ideas talked about in the sequel of Acts.

So to set the scene for us, Luke 24 brings us near the end of the Gospel. Jesus is the promised Messiah, He has paid the penalty for sin, He has conquered death. And for 40 days after His resurrection, He's teaching His disciples some final things before He ascends into heaven.

And at one point, early on in these 40 days, he encounters His disciples and unpacks exactly why He came and died and rose again in the first place:

Luke 24:44

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

First, Jesus tells them, "This is what the Scriptures" -- which for them would have been the Old Testament -- "have been pointing you towards the whole time." The Bible isn't simply a collection of spiritual proverbs, or rules for living, or accounts of history, though many of those things can be found in its pages; rather, in the Bible we have been given the true story of everything.

Now, notice what else Jesus says here about the Bible.

Luke 24:45

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

In that moment, Jesus does a little Bible study with them to explain what exactly he means by what he said in verse 44. "Everything in the Hebrew Bible is fulfilled in me." "Yeah, totally." "Okay, let me tell you what I mean." Imagine if Jesus is your LifeGroup leader.

And then, there's a passing of time that takes place. Cue the montage. And then after Jesus walks them through this Bible study, here's what he says in verse 46.

Luke 24:46

and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead

Whenever Jesus says, "Thus is it written", it's meant to clue you into something previously said in the Old Testament. And this is his summary statement of the whole Bible - that Christ, the Messiah, the anointed should suffer and rise from the dead. He says that's what the whole Old Testament is getting at...but then he adds another part to it, keep reading in v.47:

Luke 24:47

"that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations."

So it's not only that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, but also that because of what Jesus has accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection, now everyone is invited to be forgiven of their sin, to be adopted into the family of God, to take part in the Kingdom of God.

“Proclaim” in Greek - κηρύσσω - to be a herald of a message. This was like a royal official or authority figure who had an important announcement to tell others.

And that message is that everyone can get in on what God is up to. He’s taking the world to its inevitable conclusion, which is to see the world transformed into the Kingdom of God once and for all. And Jesus says in Luke 24 that this is what the whole Bible is all about. God making a way for sinful people to enter into His presence.

That just as God created the world, with the intended design to have everyone worship Him in love and unity, our sin has destroyed that. So rather than being people in loving community with God and one another, we’re all separated from each other.

Sin has now trickled down into the human heart. We look to our own self-interests. We’d rather worship and chase after other things than worship God and who He is.

But in this beautiful twist, God chases after us. He makes a covenant promise us to pursue us and redeem us from our sin. And when God makes a promise, He keeps it. So all throughout the Bible we see that God is on the move to rescue His people. To undo what the curse of sin has so messed up. To purify our hearts and renew humanity back into His presence.

And so all throughout the Hebrew Bible, no matter how far gone it seems like His people are, no matter how evil and wicked everything seems, God keeps pursuing. Never stopping. I mean, if you read the Old Testament it gets pretty dark at times. It’s meant at times to horrify you - to think, whoa, people did that? And that’s part of the point, that no matter how low humanity seems to descend, God is always on the move to win His people to Himself. That is His mission, and through Jesus that mission is being accomplished and will one day be completed.

Theologian Christopher Wright puts it like this:

Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*

The whole Bible is itself a missional phenomenon. The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God. The Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation. The Bible is the drama of this God of purpose engaged in the mission of achieving that purpose universally, embracing past, present and future, Israel and the nations, "life, the universe and everything," and with its centre, focus, climax, and completion in Jesus Christ.

Then I love this last bit especially:

Mission is not just one of a list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that [much used] phrase, "what it's all about."

In other words, what Wright is saying is, when we talk about mission - that is, being witnesses to who Jesus is - that's not some optional add-on for those who really want to take their faith seriously. And it's not just for the quote/unquote professionals in church ministry. Mission is at the very heart of what the Bible is all about. To put it more succinctly: From page one to the very last, God is a missional God. This is a God who is continually on the move, taking the world to its eventual completion when all the world will be brought back into its original design, free from sin, free from death and disease and destruction, to worship Him once and for all.

And because of that, now we have a crucial role to play in the story, look at what Jesus says again in Luke 24:

Luke 24:48-49

You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you.

His primary means and method that He uses is to do through ordinary people like you and me, empowered by His Spirit to make much of Jesus as the King of the world. Which is wild to think about. Again, if you look back at the Old Testament, God uses lots of miraculous signs and wonders to get His message across to people. A burning bush in Exodus 3. A whale in the book of Jonah. A pillar of fire. It's like, if I were living in ancient times and I saw a tower of fire in the wilderness I'd be like, "Yup, that's God. Okay, I should probably listen up."

And yet, God in his wisdom decided that, now that Jesus has risen from the dead, His primary means to get His name known throughout the world and call people to Himself is through us empowered by His Spirit to complete the mission He set out to complete from page 1 of the Bible. And it's not because He NEEDS us, or anything like that, but through engaging in the mission of God we are now invited to take part in the story He's writing.

And in the book of Acts that's precisely what we see taking place.

Acts 1:8

"...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."

So as God's Spirit moves in the disciples, so we begin to see God's Spirit and God's story moving into the lives of others...

- Acts 2 - God's Spirit bringing thousands of people to faith in Jesus and thus in 33 AD, starts the first local church in Jerusalem.
- Acts 4 - Peter and John empowered by the Spirit to heal a man who was born unable to walk.
- Acts 6 - leaders being raised up to serve the church, and as a result, the church continues to grow and spread.
- Acts 7 - the first Christian martyr, Stephen, dying for his faith. And as a result, you see lots of people leaving Jerusalem in fear of their lives. But that doesn't stop the movement

of God. Those people are scattered now, which means they're spreading throughout the Roman Empire telling more people about Jesus and planting more churches in the process.

- Acts 8 - the gospel goes out even further. This time to an Ethiopian eunuch, the first non-Jewish person we see come to faith in Jesus. Acts 8 is a marker of how the Gospel is crossing racial and geo-political barriers. The gospel message is beginning to spread to the nations.

This is where we left off in the Spring. Starting next week we'll be going through Acts 9-28, and what we'll see from this point on is the story keeps going. It'll spread to other Greek areas, eventually going all the way to Rome itself, and the story keeps going.

- 49 AD - Paul to Turkey
- 51AD - Paul to Greece
- 52AD - Thomas to India
- 54 AD - Paul on his third missionary journey to places like Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, places that we have letters written to the churches there, to people that aren't Jewish. Again, we're to see the mission of God spreading to the nations.

And it doesn't stop there. God's Spirit and God's story keeps on going well after the book of Acts is over.

- 174 - first Christians reported in Austria
- 280 – reports of churches in northern Italy
- 350 AD - 31.7 million people in the Roman Empire who claim Jesus as Lord, when it went from a handful only 300 years prior.
- 432 - Patrick heads to Ireland as missionary. He spends 30 years traveling around the countryside telling people the good news of God's blessing through Jesus. One day he found himself in front of the king of Ireland, and like a good missionary he wanted to put the gospel into context so the king could understand it, so he bent down and picked up a shamrock and used the 3 leaves on it to illustrate how we have one Trinitarian God. (Heads up, that's a bad analogy of the Trinity. That's modalism, Patrick.) We celebrate that day every year by wearing green, pinching each other, and people in Five Points getting really drunk.

But the mission of God keeps going and going. Because God's not done writing His story.

- 596 – Gregory the Great sends Augustine to what is now England to reintroduce the gospel. Within a year they baptized about 10,000 people.
- 635 - first missionaries to China
- 740 – missionaries reach Iceland
- 900 - missionaries reach Norway
- 1200 - The Bible translated into 22 different languages
- 1492 – Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue discovering the Americas. Pope Alexander the 6<sup>th</sup> grants to Spain the newly discovered land in the Americas on the condition that “the name of our Savior to be known in those parts.” He says that men and money are to be sent to tell [the people] about Jesus.

And it keeps going:

- 1537 - Pope Paul Third says to introduce the Native Americans in New York to Jesus by “preaching of the divine word and the example of a good life.”
- 1666 - John Elliot publishes a book called “The Indian Grammar”. So that people can explain the gospel in Native American languages.
- 1671 - Quaker missionaries arrive in the Carolinas, and according to the SC Department of Archives
- 1795 – a group of Presbyterians planted the first official church in Columbia, South Carolina.
- 2007 – God gathered a group of people in Columbia SC - the greatest city in the world - to be Jesus-Centered Family on mission with him.

Now that’s a quick fly-by look at how we got here but my point is that God is on the move, and you and I sitting here right now are evidence of that! You and I are here because God is a missionary God who is writing His story through His people, carrying out His message to proclaim the good news to the world.

#### God’s Story in our Church

And by God’s grace, the story doesn’t stop there. Since 2007, we’ve seen God’s Spirit move in our church family as He continues to write His story in and through us. By the grace of God we’ve seen:

- People come to faith in Jesus and get baptized every year.
- Hundreds upon hundreds of people over the last 15 years have hopped into a LifeGroup and experienced what biblical community is really like, living out what the early church is called to be in Acts 2: sharing meals together, studying the Bible together, doing life together.
- We’ve seen people set free from addictions and experience healing by taking part in our Recovery program.
- We’ve seen leaders and volunteers raised up to sacrifice their time and energy to care for, and serve, and shepherd the people in our church.
- We’ve seen people in our church family be so financially generous that we’ve been able to send out 5 church plants so that the Gospel can go further and by God’s grace we hope to plant more.

And we don’t say that to make a big deal about us. God does not NEED us one bit; we’re just in awe of the fact that God is continuing to write His story and that He’s chosen us to help be a part of it. I am just in awe on a regular basis that I get to do this with y’all. Seeing the stuff we get to see God do here is not normal. It’s nothing short of miraculous.

And so my question for us is as we enter into this new season of ministry - Will we continue to live into this story that God set out from the beginning of time to bring the world to Himself? Because this is essentially who the Church is. We are called to be a Jesus-centered family on mission.

Luke 24:48 makes it really clear:

Luke 24:48

You are witnesses of these things.

You know who Jesus is, you know what He's done. He has given you the Spirit to accomplish the task. This means two things:

1 - The church has always been a missional creature.

The church has always been a movement built around the conviction that Jesus had died as the only Savior for sinners and that he had risen from the dead, that he was the rightful Lord of the earth and all people everywhere were now commanded to repent and are invited to come home to him. Throw down your idols now so you can free your hands up to worship Him. The Church is truly the church when we re-embrace what it means to be on mission, to take part in the movement that God's called us to all along.

2 - Everyone is a missionary.

You are a witness. You have a purpose. Your life is now infused with meaning. The beauty is, because of King Jesus, you don't have to find yourself to figure out your meaning in life. You don't have to find the right set of circumstances to discover your purpose in life. Because of Jesus, He has given you this purpose by making you a part of His story. To get swept up and caught in what God is doing and to tell others about Him.

And as a church family, this is our heart for you more than anything:

- To see your life caught up in this story
- To learn how to function as this type of community of tight-knit relationships
- To pray for the mission of God around us
- To invite others to groups and gatherings.
- To share our stories of how Jesus has saved us and what He's teaching
- To grow together as missionaries as we go out and make friends with people, and share with them what Jesus has done for them

So as we move through the book of Acts for the next 3 months, we're dedicating this next season to move in that direction. We're always moving in that direction, but for the Fall we just want to make that a bit more overt when it comes to how to live on mission and be a part of what God is doing. We've created a Mission Guide that all LifeGroups are working through together this Fall, starting this coming week in your LifeGroups. It's going to be six weeks long, and it's basically formatted like a LifeGroup Guide, except that each week you'll be given a practical way to be on mission. So each week will come with a brief training video and a worksheet and we're going to learn together

- How to be a people who intentionally pray for those who don't know Jesus
- How to share the Gospel message

- How to share your faith with others in a way that's not pushy or weird
- How to build rhythms into your life to open up your life and your home to others

And all of it is under this banner that if we stick to this for the next six weeks, the more we can fully live out what it means to be on mission in our city. And then starting next week we'll be having Scripture Guides for you to dive deep into the passages we'll be teaching from and bringing back our Midweek Podcast to go more in-depth on the Sunday sermons.

And all the while, with all this training and resources, it's not meant to simply give you something to do, rather it's to help us all get swept up into the story of God.

To help us see that God's story to draw the world to Himself is not just His story, and it's not just our church's story, but if you're a follower of Jesus, it gets to be your story too. That if you are a follower of Jesus you have now been swept up into this. God has moved in you by His Spirit, and now you can be a part of this movement. There are represented in this room hundreds of stories I could share but just to cite a handful:

- I think about some of us, myself included, who grew up in the church and my parents were simply faithful to bring me to church on Sundays and it was through the children's ministry I heard the Gospel and realized the need for Jesus and came to faith in Jesus.
  - But the story doesn't stop there
- I think about my wife who grew up never hearing the Gospel, and then she came to USC as a freshman and there was a college ministry out promoting their ministry and she got their information, and eventually someone was really intentional with her to tell her about Jesus. And over lots of coffee and questions, she placed her faith in Jesus and she was baptized here at our church in 2009.
  - But the story doesn't stop there
- I think of my friend Emma who grew up around the church, but it wasn't until 2016 that her friend kept inviting her to come to church that eventually she caved and began coming around our church. And at some point the Lord drew her in, she was baptized in 2019, and now her and her husband lead the LifeGroup I am a part of.
  - And the story keeps going
- I think about my friend Mitch, who was adamantly not a Christian for the first 80+ years of his life, and he began coming around our church and hopped into a LifeGroup. And after years of years of attending LifeGroup, and our entire church family praying for him, one day in 2020 he says in LifeGroup, "Hey, this coming Sunday I think I'm gonna take communion." And his leaders were like "Why would you do that?" And Mitch says, "Because I'm a Christian now."
  - And the story keeps going



- I think about our friend Benny, who was living at Transitions getting a ride to our church a few years back and met some of you all at a Sunday Gathering. He eventually hopped into a LifeGroup and had all these people pouring into his life and it made such a profound impact on his life that in 2021 we celebrated him getting baptized in this room, with his LifeGroup surrounding him, and earlier this year, he passed away and is now before the presence of Jesus right now worshipping Him.
  - And the story continues.

Church, God has not finished writing His story yet. There are still pages and chapters that God still intends to write. And He intends to use me and you to write them.

So as we move into a new season in our church family, as we look at the book of Acts together and work this out practically in LifeGroups, our hope and prayer is that we will see more and more stories like this, of God working in us to make Him known to the people in our city. That God might unleash His Spirit power in us to be faithful missionaries right here in Columbia.

And if we're faithful to the call...

- Who knows who else we will get to baptize in the years to come? Whether that be a kid in Kidtown, or a college student who was far from Jesus, or something who was so opposed to Jesus for so long?
- Who know who else we will see be loosened by the grips of addiction as they begin to see victory over sin?
- Who knows what leaders we'll get to raise up and what other churches we'll get to send out?
- Who knows what funerals are to be had as we celebrate the fact that people we encountered in our church family are now encountering Jesus face-to-face free from sin, forever?

By God's Spirit, lets press on towards faithfulness so we can be a part of those stories.