

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH



Studies in Acts 1-7

Bathurst Presbyterian Church 2018

The book of Acts is a wonderful book for showing us that, as followers of Jesus, we are caught up in something much bigger than ourselves. We are involved in the passing on of a message which has been transforming peoples' lives in every single country on the face of this earth for thousands of years. And the key to seeing this, is to understand Acts is a book all about the ongoing work of the risen Christ.

This will be a helpful thing to bear in mind during this course of studies because it will stop us misapplying the text. In Acts, Luke describes many extraordinary events and there is a danger in thinking these events should also happen to us. We need to realise Luke may be recording something simply because that's what happened then and not necessarily because it's what should happen for us now. We therefore need to be careful not to read and apply things directly to ourselves simply because we may like the sound of what did or didn't happen to the apostles. Realising that Acts is essentially about Jesus will help us to avoid that danger, for as we read through Acts the primary question we must keep asking ourselves is; what are we discovering about the risen Jesus Christ?

As with any study, you'll get the most out of them if you're able to read the relevant passage and answer the questions before your group meets. That will also equip you to best encourage the others in your group with what you say. However, if some weeks you don't get to prepare, please don't use that as an excuse to not go along. Just being there is a great way of showing the group that they're important to you. Plus, the studies are designed to be useful even if you're thinking about them for the first time at your group.

Each study firstly works through the verses (section by section) so as to help build an understanding of what the overall passage means. The study then ends with a "Think it through" section in which practical applications are considered for us as individual Christians, as well as for us as a church family. In so doing we'll discover the exciting truth that we are all involved in the ongoing work of the risen Christ, as he grows his kingdom to the ends of the earth..



Acts 1

Read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3

1. In what ways are Luke and Acts similar? In what ways are they different?

Read Acts 1:4-8

2. It would seem that the apostles are going to have an important role in what Jesus will continue to do and teach. What does Jesus want the disciples to do and why?

3. What signs are there that Jesus' plans are different to what the disciples expect? (v6-8)

4. The apostles were people like Peter, James, John. What do you know of their track record with Jesus up until this chapter? How surprising is Jesus' mission for them?

Read Acts 1:9-26

5. What characteristics are important for Judas' replacement to have? Why are they important?

6. Skim back over the chapter and list as many examples as you can of Jesus being the one in charge and controlling all the action.

7. Skim back over the chapter and list as many things as you can about the kingdom of God.

Think it through

- In what ways are we different to the apostles? In what ways are we similar?

- Where do we fit into Jesus' mission plan of 1:8? What difference should this mission plan make to us?

- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks that king Jesus has risen from the dead and that by God's grace, we can be part of his ongoing, growing Kingdom.

Acts 2

Read Acts 2:1-13

1. What happens to the apostles when they were first filled with the Holy Spirit?
2. How does this fit with Jesus' mission briefing back in 1:8?

Read Acts 2:14-21

3. According to v17 the filling of the apostles with the Holy Spirit reflects that the "last days" have now commenced. According to v20 what do these last days precede?
4. The "day of the Lord" is a reference to the final judgment when God will punish all sin. What is it necessary to do during these last days preceding the "day of the Lord"? (v21)

Read Acts 2:22-36

5. In these verses Peter tells the crowd some crucial things about Jesus. Let's see if we can tease out some of the main points of his speech. According to v22-24 what did men do to Jesus? What did God do?
6. According to v27 what did the Old Testament predict about God's coming King? In the light of the previous answer what does this tell us about Jesus?
7. According to v33 where is Jesus now and what has he done?

8. According to v34 what did the Old Testament predict about God's coming King? In the light of the previous answer what does this tell us about Jesus?

9. Peter has been drawing some parallels between Jesus and the Christ predicted in the Old Testament. Verse 36 now comes as Peter's punch line. Have a go at rewriting it in your own words.

Read Acts 2:37-41

10. How would you describe the crowd's reaction?

11. What does Peter say they should do and why?

Think it through

- In what ways are we different to the apostles? In what ways are we similar?

- In what ways are we different to the crowd in Acts 2? In what ways are we similar?

- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks that in these last days, forgiveness of sins is possible because of Jesus. Pray for the people in your life who need to hear this good news.

Acts 3:1-4:31

Read Acts 3

1. Who does this miracle involve and where does it take place?

2. What does the man do after being healed? Note especially where he goes. Why do you think this is significant?

3. The scene which follows this miracle is very similar to what followed the events of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter uses an extraordinary event as an opportunity to witness about Jesus. Compare Peter's speech here in Acts 3 with the one he made in Acts 2 (study 1). Note in particular:

what truths about Jesus does Peter repeat?

what response does Peter call on the crowd to make?

how do the crowds respond?

Read Acts 4:1-22

4. Why do Peter and John get arrested?

5. How do the Peter and John react to their arrest?

6. What new things do we discover about the risen Christ from this confrontation?

Read Acts 4:23-31

7. What do the believers prayer? In what way is this surprising?

8. After Peter and John's release the believers quote Psalm 2 in their prayers. Psalm 2 describes the kings of this world lined up against God's Holy King but that God's King laughs at the puniness of their opposition and warns them to submit before it's too late (if you have time why not read the psalm). In what ways do you see the perspective of Psalm 2 influencing the behavior of the apostles?

Think it through

- "Peter and John are superheroes of the faith. It's easy for them to be brave. I'm just a normal person. I can't be expected to be as bold as them." What do you think about a comment like that?

- Do you personally experience any opposition to Jesus? What effect does it have on you?

- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Give thanks that Jesus is the risen King of God in whom we are eternally safe.

Acts 4:32-5:42

Read Acts 4:32-5:11

1. In what ways were the believers caring for one another? How is Barnabas an especially "encouraging" example of this?

2. What was Ananias and Sapphira's sin? Why do you think they did it?

3. Why do you think "great fear" seized the church (v11)?

4. What does this incident show about -

the authority of the apostles

the preciousness of Christ's church

Read Acts 5:12-42

5. Think about the overall pattern of events in these verses. They show a basic similarity to what we discovered in the previous chapter ie the apostle perform miracles - the gospel is preached - the apostle are arrested and threatened - the apostles boldly keep preaching. What is different between Acts 5:12-42 and Acts 3-4 in terms of:

the reason for the opposition

the number of people involved

intensity of the opposition

6. How do the apostles respond to this new opposition? What reasons do they give for their response?

7. What do we learn about Jesus from Peter's speech?

8. What is Gamaliel's argument? What do you think of it?

Think it through

- In this study we have seen the work of the risen Christ opposed out of jealousy (5:17). In your experience, what are other reasons that Christianity is criticised and opposed?

- "We must obey God rather than men." (5:29). When do you find this especially hard? What are some specific, practical ways we can help each other in this matter?

- In this study we discovered how a reverent fear of the risen Christ seized the church. How should a reverent of Jesus shape -
 - how we handle temptation

 - the way we treat other Christians

 - our attitude to our church

 - our prayer and bible reading

Prayer

Pray that we may live out a reverent fear of Jesus Christ in all of life.

Acts 6-7

Read Acts 6:1-7

1. What is the source of the tension amongst the believers?
2. Why is this such a serious problem? What solution is reached?
3. Do you think this was a good solution? Why or why not?
4. In what way has Jesus' mission plan (1:8) shaped the church's dealing with this problem? (v7)

Read Acts 6:8-15

5. Who are the people opposing Stephen?
6. What specific charges are made against Stephen?
7. Why do you think these charges are so serious?

Read Acts 7

8. Stephen has been accused of being against the Temple. What does Stephen say about the temple in v44-50? In what way is this a defense against the accusations?

9. Stephen has been accused of being against Moses. What does Stephen say about Moses in v35-39? In what way is this a defense against the accusations?
10. What does the Sanhedrin get most annoyed about in Stephen's speech? Why?
11. What finally happens to Stephen? How does that make you feel?
12. In 7:58-8:1 we are introduced to a young man named Saul. What impressions do you get of him? (hold onto this thought for our next study)

Think it through

- In Acts 6:1-2 the disciples are in danger of being diverted from the task to which God had called them. In what ways are we susceptible to the same danger? Can you think of "good" things which can divert us from the "best" things in following the risen Christ.

- "The God of the Old Testament is one of wrath and judgment but the God of the New Testament is one of grace and love." What do you think about this comment? How do you think Stephen would respond to it?

- Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

Prayer

Do you know of someone experiencing real hardship because of their faith? Pray for their endurance and perseverance.