



The Gathering message notes

re|ACTS - Week 1 - September 9, 2012 / Paul Jenkins

THE BIG IDEA: When we _____ without the
_____, God's kingdom comes _____.

1. Acts is more _____ than _____

2. Acts is more _____ than _____

The Take-Off

This morning we're starting a new series that we kind of hesitate to call a series, mainly because we think of a series as 3-5 weeks on the same topic and then move on to the next one.

Maybe series isn't the best term for what we're kicking off today on our Kick Off Sunday. I think "journey" might be a better word.

So, this morning we're kicking off a journey together in the book of Acts, and it will probably help if we do a bit of background on what this book is about and then see if we can wrap it up with one statement that will help us on the journey.

The goal today is to try and frame what you and I are going to be learning on this journey, and maybe to explain what we think is the best way to approach it so that we can learn the most on it.

1. Acts is more story than book

One of our core values at The Gathering involves stories: we love 'em! We love to tell them over and over again because they bring glory to God and grace to each other.

We believe that everyone's got a story, and it's no different with Acts.

Even a collection of stories like Acts has a story, or at least, a backstory.

Verse 1 mentions it right away: the author, Luke, who wrote this somewhere around 60 AD, mentions a former book, and we know that former book as the gospel of Luke.

You don't have to turn to it, but a quick glance at the beginning of both books show they were written to a guy named Theophilus. In fact, most of the people who study stuff like this believe that Luke and Acts were at one time one book.

Why is that important? Only because Luke 1:4 explains why all of this stuff was written in the first place: so that Theo specifically - and us generally - could be more and more confident in our faith.

So the book of Luke tells us the story of Jesus, and the book of Acts tells us the story of the Holy Spirit.

If ever there was a book that screams, "It ain't over!" that book would be Acts.

In fact, another one of Jesus' followers wrote in John 14:12 that Jesus believed that the church would do greater things than He did. We'll dissect that verse some more later on the journey, but for now let's just say that this book of Acts is a collection of stories about people just like you and me doing those greater things.

Now, before we totally jump into the next point - which admittedly many of us may struggle with - let me make something clear: for many, it seems easy to discount the book of the Bible, or a book in the Bible.

We say things like "I'm not a believer or a follower of Jesus so I don't need the Bible."

That's kind of true, and yet let me just say this to you. If you're with us this morning and you're not a believer, it's great to have you here and while there are a lot of things that we'll read on this journey through Acts that you don't have to do, there may be more in these stories than you realize.

All of us want to grow, right? If you're in business, you want your business to grow. If you're an athlete, you want your performance to grow. Shoot, if you're simply breathing, most of us would agree that we want to be better and simply handling situations that life throws at us.

So, unless you don't care about growth, you've got a lot to learn from the stories that we're going to discover here. I mean, who can't learn something from an organization that grew from 120 to 2 billion, right?

2. Acts is more doing than knowing

Of course, once I spit a stat out like that, I've got your attention, and more than likely you responded in your mind the way most Americans do.

You asked yourself one question: "How'd they do that?"

Who doesn't want to know how a group grew 16.5 million% over time? Our church has grown by 170% over the past year, and while that's impressive, it's not 16.5 million!

There's nothing inherently wrong with responding this way, but it isn't the Jesus approach. It's the American approach, or, more specifically, the Western approach.

Our process works like this: teach me, and then I'll do what you taught me. Knowing makes us feel more confident, and if we lack confidence, we look for a book to read or a seminar to attend.

Jesus' process is revealed in the first verse of Acts: "Jesus began to do and to teach."

His approach was exactly the opposite. The learning came in the doing. That's why faith is so important.

We've said this before: the confused mind says no, and that's true. But the trusting mind says yes.

Now, I don't want you to write off the whole journey before we even begin because I mentioned the F word, so let's process this a bit more before we wrap up for the day and all go home and watch Cam and the Panthers win. Faith is something that all of us use daily. All of us understand it. We all expect others to use it.

In fact, I will argue that the method Jesus used with His disciples and the church in Acts isn't as foreign to us as we all think it is.

If you're a parent or have had a parent (which is all of us) then you've used this "do then know" approach or had it used on you many times. It's a short little phrase that all parents swear they will never say but at some point all parents do. It's only 4 words, and you already know what they are.

"Because I said so."

See, parents - and often, employers - already use this teaching style, don't they! And for the most part, we hate it because it calls into question our level of trust - or faith - in the person telling us what to do.

One of my favorite parts about lifeguarding was watching parent stand in the water waiting on their children to jump. Sometimes they would tread water forever in the deep end waiting for the child to jump off the diving board. Without fail, the longer they had to wait, the shorter the words of encouragement got, until finally they simply said, "Trust me."

[Ill] Asking for money to cover my salary BEFORE stepping out in faith.

Now, before we think that trust and faith would come more naturally to us if we lived in the east, let's take a quick look at how the early followers of Jesus struggled with it, too.

Jesus gave these guys one command, just one thing to do: wait for the gift that had been promised (vv. 4-5).

They followed up with a question to help them understand what was going to happen (v. 6).

See, even they wanted to understand before they obeyed! And Jesus was not changing His method for them. He answered in vv. 7-8 with basically, "You don't need to know all that, because if you'll do what I'm telling you, that stuff will work itself out."

Even after Jesus ascended (now that's a magic trick!), the disciples still just kind of stood there watching. My guess is that they were trying to understand what they were seeing. It took 2 angels to snap them out of it and remind them to go and DO what they had been told.

See, faith and trust isn't really natural, no matter where you live, but everything that we'll read on this journey through Acts - and some of it will be pretty weird - all hinged on the followers of Jesus obeying before understanding.

And that's the key to this whole "re|ACTS" series: will we trust God enough to play a little follow the leader with Him just like the early church did? Before there were conferences and church growth seminars, they were just like us: a small church in a small room in a small town. In fact, there were 120 of them and there's about 120 of us. But when they started to do before they knew, the results were earth shattering.

The Landing

Here's the Big Idea that I think will help us journey through this collection of amazing stories: When we try without the why, God's kingdom comes alive.

It's not much different from the childhood game we all played. Someone would lead, and whatever they did, the people in line behind them did. Of course, we trusted the leader not to do anything dangerous or illegal, and because we trusted them, we laughed a lot and tried everything even if we looked silly.

We didn't have to understand the moves or even perfect the moves. We just had to trust and try.

The game wouldn't have been as much fun if we had always stopped to ask for an explanation about why the leader chose to do whatever move he or she did. The fun came in simply following their lead.

Today we kickoff a new year in the life of our church.

We've seen some amazing things over the last 12 months, and if we continue to trust and obey, the best will always be yet to come.

You are invited on a journey of remembering ACTS and doing what we see even if we don't fully understand.

Welcome to the start of something great!