

Message Date: 07-19-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 3: Things get real

Message Title: Week 1, An Inevitable Result

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✠ **Things Get Real! OPENING**

- **What is the greatest threat to Christianity today? Greatest crisis...**
- **Lots of answers people may give**
  - **Deterioration of societal values- church holds little influence in culture today... Example, Sunday's no longer 'sacred'... difficult to find time to gather youth**
  - **Attack on religious liberties, especially in govt, and by govt**
  - **OR, shallowness of Christianity itself, lack of discipleship, comprising of biblical teaching and values, false doctrines/prosperity/politicization/legalism...**
  - **MAYBE even threat of persecution, fear of being ostracized or worse for our faith...**
- **All of these things are real, and all disturbing. BUT, are any of them truly the greatest crisis for the health and vibrancy of Christianity, and God's work through us?**
- **Today we are starting PART THREE in our journey through acts, and in the coming weeks we will see multiple crisis impact this new community of Christ followers, including the Intensification of persecution. In a sense, you could say that starting with chapter FIVE, for the believers in Jerusalem, the honeymoon is over. THINGS ARE GETTING REAL.**
- **But as the challenges mount for the believers, specifically for the apostles and leaders, we are going to see something really important- FIRST POINT in outline...**

As we move into Acts chapter five, we will see that the greatest crisis facing the new community of Christ followers is not the threat of external persecution, but of INTERNAL division.

- **The greatest crisis facing the believers is not the power of the Sanhedrin... it is the threat of a loss of UNITY, and discord, within the COMMUNITY.**
- **If we look through NT, we will see that this wasn't just the case for the early church, it is for us as well. IF WE ASK NT, "What is the most important thing for our witness to the world around us, the single greatest evidence of our faith in Christ? IT ISN'T OUR DOCTRINAL PURITY... although of course faithfulness to scripture is important.**
- **IT IS THE UNITY OF THE BODY, and the LOVE WE HAVE FOR EACH OTHER.**

John 17: 20... JESUS prays... *I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,<sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

John 13: 34 JESUS... *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.<sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

- **THIS is the most important thing, and the loss of the unity of the body, and our love for each other, is the greatest crisis the church can face.**

- **HERE'S THE KEY!** We will never retain our unity, and our love for one another, through our own strength and determination. A million things will always be working to undermine our unity, and there are plenty of examples today.
- We will only remain unified, genuinely living out Jesus' love for each other, if we are enabled by a deeper reality... and this reality is focus of our message today.
- **SO,** before we step into the drama of Acts chapter five, Luke will put an exclamation point on the events of Acts chapters 2-4, as he gives us a recap of what God is doing through this community of believers in Jerusalem. And it is nothing less than a....

#### ✠ A living miracle

- Our text is Acts 4:32-37... But before we go there, **THANK YOU FOR JOINING WITH US TODAY.** It is Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, and from the mountains of the Eagle Valley in Colorado, I'm Pastor Ethan, and this is Trinity online.
- **PRAY. SCRIPTURE READ.**

#### PART TWO

- **WOW.** Did you grasp all that is happening here?
  - Total unity of heart and mind in the believers
  - Didn't claim any possessions, shared everything they had
  - Apostles Continued to testify daily to resurrection
  - God's grace at work powerfully among all of them, no one had need
  - People sell their land, houses, entrusted \$\$ to apostles for the community, for any need
  - Community continues to grow. People continue to believe.
- Friends, that is incredible. It is miraculous. But it is also very easy to read this, and completely miss the point... which church has done over centuries.
- "Okay...we want church to grow like it did then... SO... here's what you all need to do!"
  - We have to be in agreement! Oh crud, we have to be in agreement...hmmm... okay, whatever the leadership says, that goes! Stop being disagreeable!
  - We need to be SUPER generous. That means TITHING at a minimum, and then doing offerings above that. Tithes and offerings people... say it with me...
  - We need to all be evangelists... we all need to be sharing the gospel daily... get out there!
  - Did I mention that you need to be generous? If you don't have money to give, well, maybe you need to sell something. That's what they did back in the day!
- How do you motivate people to do all of this? The tried and true religious tools of obligation, guilt, emotional manipulation, promise of reward, fear of punishment, distorted gratitude that is really guilt... "Jesus did this for you, what are you doing for him?"
- Here's the thing. Agreement, sacrificial generosity, sharing our faith... all important! Essential attributes of a healthy, biblical community of faith! But they will never happen-sustained- just because we decide that they are important and pull out all of our religious motivational, strategic planning, and leadership tools to make them happen! RATHER!

✠ Everything that is happening in the community of Christ followers is the inevitable result of one reality: The presence of, and the disciples dependence upon, the HOLY SPIRIT.

- Seven different times in Acts, Luke references that the disciples are doing what they are doing because the presence, and equipping, of the Spirit. Last week we saw that the disciples were **ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**, and thus spoke God’s word boldly.
- Throughout entire NT we see teaching that God’s work through us is the result of His Spirit.
  - **Philippians 2:13... IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU to will and act according to his good purpose**
  - **Romans 7:6- we serve in the new way of the Spirit, not the old way of the written code**
  - **Concept of the ‘fruit of the spirit’... the expression of God’s nature and will through our lives when we are yielded to the spirit’s presence and work in our lives**
  - **MANY, MANY more**
- **OF COURSE, in the church, communication is important! Solid biblical teaching is essential! Leadership, creativity, planning are ways the Spirit at times will lead us. But the ESSENTIAL element is NOT communication, leadership, creativity, and planning. IT IS THE SPIRIT.**
- **And here’s the miracle- when we are living/walking/following the Spirit’s work in our lives, then doing the WORK OF GOD not only becomes possible, it becomes INEVITABLE.**
- **This is what is happening in this first community of believers. There is NO evidence that the apostles ever sat down and put together the strategy of how the church would grow as it did. What they did, in everything, was proclaim the resurrection of Christ, and lead the disciples to live by the Spirit. Everything that happened was a result of how God then led them to act during this time.**
- **SO, let’s look at this passage again. But instead of focusing on the specific things they did and how they did them, let’s look for the underlying principles of how the Spirit moved these disciples to inevitably think, live, and act.**

✠ An inevitable result of the Holy Spirit is **UNITY** <sup>2a</sup>All the believers were one in heart and mind.

- **HEART and MIND. How we feel about things, our gut, and way we think- choices.**
- **When we are living in dependence upon the Spirit, God will always lead us- his followers- into unity. Thoughts and activity that leads to divisiveness is not the work of the Spirit.**
- **If there is disunity within the body, there may be issues of communication, legitimate disagreements... but the underlying issue is a lack of trust and following of the Spirit.**
- **EASY TO DISTORT!.. “if you don’t agree with me, you must not be following the spirit”... ever had that thrown at you? There are times when the unity of believers necessitates significant discussion, listening, honesty, and great humility, but always, most of all, trust in and submission to the Holy SPIRIT.**

✠ An inevitable result of the Holy Spirit is **GENEROSITY**

<sup>2b</sup>No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

- **We covered this earlier in Acts 2, but this is not a Biblical mandate for socialism. There’s no evidence this dynamic in the Jerusalem church spread beyond Jerusalem, and this type of shared ownership is not taught in rest of NT. But what DID spread throughout the church, and what IS taught in the NT is the principle here.... GENEROSITY that flows from Love of God, love of other people and the motivation of HOLY SPIRIT at work in our lives.**
- **When living by the Spirit, we will be people with generous hearts, however that looks.**

✠ An inevitable result of the Holy Spirit is Christ being revealed through His DISCIPLES

<sup>33</sup> *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*

- *When you read that, the first response (mine) was to say ‘inevitable result...’ is evangelism... sharing our faith, witnessing. Indeed, this is what the Apostles were doing, and how God had uniquely qualified and called them. HOWEVER, not all the disciples did this, at least not in the direct, public way of the Apostles. Likewise, today, not everybody is equipped and called by God to be public proclaimers of the Gospel.*
- *The bigger principle here is that the Holy Spirit DOES equip and call ALL OF US to reveal the presence and authenticity of Christ, according to how God has shaped us and calls us. This will look different in lives of different people.*
- *The holy spirit will use some people to be evangelists- share gospel in powerful way*
- *Holy spirit will use others to reveal, to express the reality and hope of Christ in other ways.*
- *THIS ISN'T TO MINIMIZE the reality that God calls HIS CHURCH, which includes all of us, to proclaim and share the message, the great hope and love of the Gospel to the world around us. Rather it is to emphasize that God carries out this work in many different ways, according to the Spirit's work in our lives... 1 Corinthians 12 might be the clearest description of this in the New Testament.*
- *BUT BOTTOM LINE... when we are living in the direction, motivation of the Holy Spirit, Christ- who he is, his nature, goodness, will be revealed through how we live and the words we say.*

✠ An inevitable result of the Holy Spirit is COMPASSION

*And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup> that there were no needy persons among them.*

- *This is another picture of the disciples generosity, but on an even deeper level. Why were there no needy people within the community of believers? Because the Grace of God- the very presence and love of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, was at work- THE moving and motivating presence in both the overall community of faith, and the lives of the individual believers. And friends, when the HOLY SPIRIT – the reality of CHRIST IN US, is the moving and motivating presence in our lives, we will be people of COMPASSION. We will genuinely love and care for the people.*
- *And church, we need to hear this... there will be times when this presence of God will lead us to love that is SACRIFICIAL. Because...*

✠ An inevitable result of the Holy Spirit is SACRIFICIAL LOVE

*For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.*

- *Okay.. first, make sure we have this in context. This is not a teaching that we all should go sell our homes, become homeless and unable to provide for our own families, and give all the money to the church. In fact, that's not really what is happening here. Rather, the sense is that there were people in the community of faith who may have owned land or houses- that while extremely valuable assets, maybe representing years of work and savings... likely was not their primary residence or the land they used to provide for their families. The people with these resources represented a small middle to upper middle class, probably less than 10% of the population. The phrase ‘time to time’ indicates that these gifts were made on a gradual basis, likely according to need within the community. This was NOT a picture of everybody selling all their possessions and giving to the church.*

- **RATHER, the principle here is that these first believers, moved by the SPIRIT, would RECOGNIZE A NEED, and take steps of sacrificial love to respond to these needs... they would do this out of the generosity and COMPASSION that welled up within them due to the presence and work of the HOLY SPIRIT.**
- **CHURCH.. I want to share a more personal thought, what comes to my mind as person who has been actively involved in church my entire life, and in vocational ministry for almost twenty years.**
- **WE CAN MAKE CHURCH SO COMPLICATED. It can be overwhelming, even draining. As followers of Christ, there is a tsunami of Christian culture telling us things to do, programs to implement, and what our lives and churches should look like if we would just implement this set of principles, that way of doing things, go to these conferences, read those books. If you aren't aware of it, the world of ministry leadership training, planning, and strategy is an absolute INDUSTRY unto itself.**
- **I have to think that if you could import the room full of believers from the end of Acts chapter four to a typical church growth, worship, and leadership conference today... once you got them past all the cultural shock so they could understand what they are seeing... they just may say... WOW! This is a LOT of resources... BUT WHERE IS THE NEED FOR THE SPIRIT?**
- **Bringing this down to our own church.. do we need to be good stewards of the resources God has provided us? YES! Do we need to think creatively about how God would bring His love and gospel to our community, starting with our own families? YES! Should we work to communicate well, and do what we do to the best of our ability? YES! Do we continuously grow in our understanding of scripture, desiring to live in obedience to God's word? YES!**
- **BUT THE GREATEST FACTOR, THE ESSENTIAL NEED, THE HOPE OF OUR CHURCH and THIS WORLD... is that JESUS CHRIST is the head of the church, and as his disciples, we daily walk with him, desiring to experience his presence and leadership, that we are first and foremost following HIM- not the plans and expectations of men- .... as we live lives that are joyful, hopeful, prayerful, and surrendered to the presence and work of HIS SPIRIT.**
- **AS PAUL WROTE IN 1 Corinthians 2:9-10..**

*as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.*

**Takeaway from today's message... is a question**

- **We've seen the inevitable result of the Holy Spirit in this first group of believers, all these years ago...**

**✠ What is the inevitable result of the Holy Spirit in YOU?**

- **Luke concludes this section with a bit of foreshadowing, as he introduces us to the story of a man named Barnabas.**

<sup>36</sup> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”),  
<sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

- **Barnabas, aptly named as we will see... was blessed with the resource of a field. Moved by the Spirit, out of his love and compassion for the people around him, and his desire to see this NEW LIFE of Jesus Christ spread to others... he sold his field and entrusted it to the Apostles. That is part of the story of the Holy Spirit's work in Barnabas' life.**
- **Today, and in this season in which we live, what is the story of the Holy Spirit in your life? In my life? In our lives as a church. What is our story?**