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Seeing Christ in the Book of Acts



Part 21 (990908WE)

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Seeing Christ in the Book of Acts KGD: Message Twenty-One (990908WE)

A few years ago Bonnie and I were at a huge garage sale called the world for sale in Southern California. Members of Grace Church had been encouraged to drop off anything saleable in a large parking lot. Thousands of items placed in long rows for a fund raising sale for the college class missions trip. At the sale something happened which has deeply impacted my life.

This is the scene. We are at the gate on Saturday morning with literally hundreds of others many of them unsaved residents of the area around the church. The gate opened and people rushed in to grab their treasures to buy. Along one side a whole bank of electrical outlets had been set up for people to test out their purchases. The book tables were nearby, so as I looked at books for an hour I could hear people plugging in appliances.

The first sound I heard that morning was an Oriental couple plugging in an old radio. On it came with the sweet strains of gospel music from a local station. Did you catch that? Out of hundreds of items, when that radio (formerly owned by a member of the church) was picked up *it was already tuned to a Christian station, all it needed was power and the message came out.*

There are the two themes of the Book of Acts: first, Christians in the 1st Century were tuned in to Christ. Secondly, all they needed was the power to come on and out came the message! Isn't that what we need to ask ourselves as we study this book ? Are we tuned in to Christ? Are we plugged into the power source?

To show you what I mean, look at [Acts 1:8](#)

"But you shall receive power (they were plugged in to the power source) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me (they were tuned in to Christ) in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Turn over to [Acts 5:20](#)

"Go, stand in the temple (by the power of being plugged into the Holy Spirit) and speak to the people all the words of this life (they were tuned into Jesus Christ)."

Welcome now to the 44th Book of God's Word. The theme of ACTS may be stated as "Christ our Mission and Message" (1:8) [Acts 1:8](#) "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (NKJV)

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

This book is the bridge taking Christ to the whole world. In it we see the lessons Christ taught His disciples in secret now proclaimed in Holy Spirit empowered boldness. The key verse outlines the book:

- ✓ witnesses in Jerusalem (1-8:3);
- ✓ Judea and Samaria (8:4-12:25);
- ✓ and to the ends of the earth (13-28).

The Gospels are the record of the Message of Christ, the Book of Acts the Message distributed and the Epistles the content of the Message. Within Acts we find the background introductions to epistles of I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon (prison epistles);

The Book of Acts covers about 30 years; these two chapters of the Book of Revelation cover the next 1,900 years.

The Book of Acts starts atop the Mount of Olives. Luke inspired by the Holy Spirit takes us from the expectant faces of the disciples lifted Heavenward as their Risen Savior ascends triumphantly to

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the Right Hand of the Father.

This book ends as the Apostle Paul is in prison in Rome and spends his days teaching God's Word!

What is in between? No less than an astounding record on a group of people who were full of a message they just had to share. [1][1] And an equally astonishing record of the supernatural empowerment they experienced. Here is a quick sketch of the work of the Holy Spirit in those 1st Century saints.

THEY WERE PLUGGED INTO THE POWER SUPPLY

In Acts, more than any other book of God's Word we find the vivid record of the empowering of the Holy Spirit. In fact there are over 50 different accounts of the work of the Holy Spirit. Let me highlight a few:

1. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that the disciples witness for Christ with boldness (1:8; 2:4; 4:8, 31; 5:32; 6:10, 13; 9; 19:6).
2. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT persons were equipped for ministry (2:17, 18; 4:8; 6:3, 5; 9:17; 11:28; 19:6; 20:28; 21:4, 11).
3. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that joy and comfort in the spirit come to faithful servants of the Lord (7:55; 8:39; 9:31; 11:24; 13:52; 20:23)
4. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that God gives direction through the inspired Scripture (1:2, 16:28:25), and 5 Spirit-filled persons sensitive to His voice receive special guidance in crucial situations (8:29, 39; 10:19; 11:12, 28; 13:2, 4:16:6 7; 21:4, 11). Not only does He help in making decisions,
5. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that truth was confirmed to the hearts of the brethren (5:32; 15:8, 28).
6. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that matters of Church discipline and administration were carried out (5:3, 9; 6:3, 5; 7:51: 15:28; 20:28).
7. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that the breakthrough of the Gospel to the Samaritans occurred (8:15 17 18, 19) and the Gentiles at Caesarea (10:19, 44, 45, 47, 11:12, 15,16; 15:8).
8. IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that the church was sending out the first missionaries at Antioch (13:2, 4) and IT IS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT who assists in various ways, all through the expansion of the church, to the uttermost parts of the earth (13:9, 52; 16:6, 7; 19:2, 6; 20:23, 28; 21:4; 28:25).

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS?

The book of Acts provides a bridge for the writings of the NT. As a second volume to Luke's Gospel, it joins what Jesus "began to do and to teach" (1:1) as told in the Gospels with what he continued to do and teach through the apostles' preaching and the establishment of the church. Besides linking the Gospel narratives on the one hand and the apostolic letters on the other, it supplies an account of the life of Paul from which we can learn the setting for his letters. Geographically its story spans the lands between Jerusalem, where the church began, and Rome, the political center of the empire. Historically it recounts the first 30 years of the church. It is also a bridge that ties the church in its beginning with each succeeding age. This book may be studied to gain an understanding of the principles that ought to govern the church of any age.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN PURPOSES OF THE BOOK?

1. *To present a history.* The significance of Acts as a historical account of Christian origins cannot be overestimated. It tells of the founding of the church, the spread of the gospel, the beginnings of congregations, and evangelistic efforts in the apostolic pattern. One of the unique aspects of Christianity is its firm historical foundation. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are established in the four Gospel narratives, and the book of Acts provides a coordinated account of the beginnings of the church.
2. *To give a defense.* One finds embedded in Acts a record of Christian defenses made to both Jews (e.g., 4:8-12) and Gentiles (e.g., 25:8-11), with the underlying purpose of conversion. It shows how the early church coped with pagan and Jewish thought, the Roman government and Hellenistic society. Luke probably wrote this work as Paul awaited trial in Rome. If his case came to court, what better court brief could Paul have had than a life of Jesus, a history of the beginnings of the church (including the activity of Paul) and an early collection of Paul's letters?
3. *To provide a guide.* Luke had no way of knowing how long the church would continue on this earth, but as long as it pursues its course, the book of Acts will be one of its major guides. In Acts we see basic principles being applied to specific situations in the context of problems and persecutions. These same principles continue to be applicable until Christ returns.
4. *To depict the triumph of Christianity in the face of bitter persecution.* The success of the church in carrying the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and in planting local churches across the Roman empire demonstrated that Christianity was not a mere work of man. God was in it (see 5:35-39).

WHERE DOES THE TITLE THE BOOK OF ACTS COME FROM?

As with the other 3 gospels, the title is derived from the author's name. According to tradition, Luke was a Gentile. The Apostle Paul seems to confirm this, distinguishing Luke from those who were "of the circumcision" (Col. 4:11, 14). That would make Luke the only Gentile to pen any books of Scripture. He is responsible for a significant portion of the NT, having written both this gospel and the book of Acts (see Author and Date).

Very little is known about Luke. He almost never included personal details about himself, and nothing definite is known about his background or his conversion. Both Eusebius and Jerome

identified him as a native of Antioch (which may explain why so much of the book of Acts centers on Antioch—cf. [Acts 11:19–27](#); [13:1–3](#); [14:26](#); [15:22, 23, 30–35](#); [18:22, 23](#)). Luke was a frequent companion of the Apostle Paul, at least from the time of Paul's Macedonian vision ([Acts 16:9, 10](#)) right up to the time of Paul's martyrdom ([2 Tim. 4:11](#)).

The Apostle Paul referred to Luke as a physician ([Col. 4:14](#)). Luke's interest in medical phenomena is evident in the high profile he gave to Jesus' healing ministry (e.g., [4:38–40](#); [5:15–25](#); [6:17–19](#); [7:11–15](#); [8:43–47, 49–56](#); [9:2, 6, 11](#); [13:11–13](#); [14:2–4](#); [17:12–14](#); [22:50, 51](#)). In Luke's day, physicians did not have a unique vocabulary of technical terminology; so when Luke discusses healings and other medical issues, his language is not markedly different from that of the other gospel writers. [\[2\]](#)[\[2\]](#)

The book of Acts ends with Paul still in Rome, which leads to the conclusion that Luke wrote these books from Rome during Paul's imprisonment there (ca. A.D. 60–62). Luke records Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 ([19:42–44](#); [21:20–24](#)) but makes no mention of the fulfillment of that prophecy, either here or in Acts. Luke made it a point to record such prophetic fulfillments (cf. [Acts 11:28](#)), so it is extremely unlikely he wrote these books after the Roman invasion of Jerusalem. Acts also includes no mention of the great persecution that began under Nero in A.D. 64. In addition, many scholars set the date of James' martyrdom at A.D. 62, and if that was before Luke completed his history, he certainly would have mentioned it. So, the most likely date for this gospel is A.D. 60 or 61. [\[3\]](#)[\[3\]](#)

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON TO LEARN FROM THIS BOOK?

One word more than any other defines the lifestyle of 1st Century Christians: homothumadon. In the NKJV of the Bible that Greek word is translated *One Accord*. A unique Greek word, used 10 of its 11 New Testament occurrences in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of Christian community. homothumadon is a compound of two words meaning to "rush along" and "in unison." The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great orchestra blend under the direction of a concertmaster, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church.

The first use of homothumadon is found in [Acts 1:14](#). There, in the Upper Room, the 11 disciples and a few women were united in prayer. Earlier strife and jealousies that marred their relationships were gone; the disciples were one, waiting for the Spirit's promised coming. Then in [Acts 2:1](#) we see 120 believers gathered, focusing together on the Lord as they sensed the Spirit's first dynamic touch. The next occurrence is verse 46, as the community (then some 3,000), "continuing daily with one accord [*homo-thumadon*] in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (KJV). Again in [4:24](#) we see the whole company, moved by Peter and John's report, as they "lifted up their voice to God with one accord" (KJV). As those who are Jesus' own make Him the common focus of their lives and seek to help each other find the Holy Spirit's freedom in their lives, homothumadon becomes the mark of Christian community.

ONE ACCORDS IN ACTS They had 'one holy passion' for:

1. **It marked their Prayers:** THEY WERE TALKING WITH GOD [Acts 1:14](#)
These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. (NKJV)
2. **It marked their Worship:** THEY WERE UNITING THEIR FOCUS [Acts 2:1](#)
When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (NKJV)
3. **It marked their Celebration of the Lord's Supper:**
THEY WERE PROCLAIMING WHAT CHRIST DID FOR THEM [Acts 2:46](#)
So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (NKJV)
4. **It marked their Shared Needs:** THEY WERE LOOKING TO THE LORD FOR HELP [Acts 4:24](#)
So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You [are] God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, (NKJV)
5. **It marked their Common Identity:** THEY WERE LOYALLY SUPPORTING EACH OTHER [Acts 5:12](#)
And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. (NKJV)
6. **It marked their Eagerness to Obey:** THEY WERE RESPONDING TO THE WORD [Acts 8:6](#)
And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. (NKJV)
7. **It marked their Gladly Following of their Leaders:**
THEY WERE WILLINGLY SUBMITTING [Acts 15:25](#)
it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (NKJV)

Sometimes we look back on these early chapters of Acts as though they picture a church that has been lost—as though unity and love and the experience of Jesus' presence are things that cannot really be ours today. Let's not make this mistake. God's Spirit is still a present reality. homothumadon is still possible in today's shattered and impersonal world. If we look for a reason for emptiness in our own experience, let's look first to our hesitancy to share ourselves with our brothers and sisters. Or look to our failure to let others pick up the burdens of our lives, and bring them in confident prayer to God.

The church, the new community Christ formed, is here today. *We are the church*. And God, the Spirit, is able to take our 11s, and our 120s and our 3,000s and, as we joyfully focus our shared life on Jesus, to orchestrate our lives to His wondrous "one accord." [\[4\]](#)[\[4\]](#)

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US IN 1999?

Lloyd Ogilvie, now chaplain [5][5] of the U.S. Senate, tells a story from his student days about the memorable experience of sailing on the *Queen Mary* from New York to Southampton. He recalls that she was a magnificent ship. Though his student's budget put him on deck Double D, he spent most of his time walking the top deck so he could enjoy the cold salt wind and watch the historic craft cut her way through the high waves. As he explored the ship, he tried to imagine what it must have been like to be aboard the *Queen Mary* in her prime—as a lovely pleasure vessel and then as a troop ship carefully evading enemy submarines.

It was years before he saw the *Queen Mary* again—as a museum piece, docked in Long Beach Harbor, California. Her gigantic engine was gone, as was most of her sailing equipment. Souvenir shops now lined her decks. The dining and lounge areas had been adapted for special groups and conventions. Her cabins were refurbished hotel rooms. Actors had been hired to play the parts of officers and crew, complete with professional British accents. Ogilvie was understandably disappointed. His own words best describe what happened:

While on board the motionless *Queen I* reviewed a documentary movie about how she was built and the way she had served through wars and changing history. The movie ended with a triumphant but somehow tragic statement, supported by an upsweep of dramatic music: "The greatest ship that ever went to sea is now the greatest ship to come and see."

The words were still on my mind the next day when I greeted the congregation of my Hollywood Presbyterian Church after worship. A woman visitor from Iowa made a comment she meant to be a compliment. The similarity to the closing lines of the movie made it just the opposite. She had heard about Hollywood Church for years and had been inspired by the influence of its preaching and program upon America. With excitement she said, "I have waited for years to visit Hollywood Presbyterian Church to see all the great things that used to happen here!"

Does that catch your attention? Did you know we as a church are only one generation away from becoming a monument to the past instead of a living body of Christ? What kept the first Century church vibrant? Luke's portrait of the infant church in [Acts 2:42](#) shows that it was a worshipping church: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

A constant Heavenward attitude was on their minds as they met, shared the Lord's Supper and lived everyday life ([cf. 2:46](#)).

Could we explain it this way? Worship will always be the primary characteristic of the church that refuses to become a monument. Why? Because the order Jesus commanded is kept. Listen to His words in [Matthew 4:10](#):

For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God (this must always come first), and Him only you shall serve (this must be second).'

What possibly has happened to us? Someone once said, "The immense tragedy of the contemporary church is that most people worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship".

A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), a pastor for 44 years across the USA was a prophet to the modern church. This is what he preached:

We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. The words, "Be still, and know that I am God," mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshiper in this middle period of the twentieth century.

Maybe we are in such a hurry on Sundays we don't pause in our hearts, and look upward into the face of God? How could we start? Try these simple steps:

- ✓ When you come in, find a seat and then immediately stop and offer to the Lord a prayer reflecting on how much you love and adore Him.
- ✓ Then try to preview some of the hymns to prepare your heart to meaningfully ascribe them to God.
- ✓ During the preaching of God's Word ask the Lord to speak to your heart through His Word, say 'Speak Lord, Thy servant is listening!'

Any choices this way would be remarkable. Once a "Dear Abby" column described a poll the writer took, asking churchgoers why they went to church. You can guess the results, not one of them mentioned worship.

An insightful pastor wrote about this as he chided, "That is not always the fault of the attenders because church leaders address God like a busy grocery store clerk, pick hymns at random, and deliver the sermon with little regard for what God's Word actually says or means for us today. Such conditions will ultimately produce a relic of a church. [6][6]"

Tonight we should ponder William Temple's definition of worship and measure our personal worship temperature and health:

"[Worship is] to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."

[1][1] **Thirty-one different Greek words are found in Acts for Christian verbal communication, and altogether they are used about 160 times. Of these, the words evangelize of preach the Gospel represent less than a third of all the usages of speaking words. The other terms are teach...**

[2][2] John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

[3][3] John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

[4][4] Richards, Lawrence O., *The Teacher's Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1987.

[5][5] Quoted from R. Kent Hughes, **ACTS**.

[6][6] Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Acts—The Church Afire*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1996.

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