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Living Life Together Because Our Family Had a Great Beginning

- what's your elevator speech?...have you heard that phrase before—if you were in an elevator with someone and they asked you to tell them to summarize some aspect of your story, but you had to do it before the elevator doors opened again, how would do it?...what's your elevator speech?...
- and of course it depends on what aspect of your life you were explaining...but there is no question that many people in this room have one or more great elevator speeches, whether you've actually take the time to put it together and have it prepared or not...
 1. for example, some of you work for great companies that have a marvelous story to tell...
 - it was founded by one or two people who had a great idea...or a compelling vision...
 - and the beginnings were very humble but now it has become a significant enterprise benefitting a lot of people...
 - but if called upon to do so---you could tell your company's story---and it's a really good one and you're glad for that...
 2. Others could give a great elevator speech about your family history...you could talk about grandma and grandpa...how they met, how they bought the first family farm...how much they paid for their first tractor...and on and on...
 - or maybe when your great-grandparents emigrated from another country and why...
 - and I fully realize that some families here have anything but a wonderful elevator speech...and thank the Lord he can restore the years the locusts have eaten...
 - but many here a wonderful story to tell about how your family was started...the foundation on which you're building today...
 3. The same may be true with some of the volunteer work you do...
 - we have several local non-profit organizations that just have a tremendous history...
 - often of just a man or a woman who became concerned about some need...or some opportunity...
 - and started operating out of the basement, or the garage...
 - it was all very simple and very humble...but it met legitimate needs in a creative way and now it is an important organization that our town relies on heavily...
 - and if called upon to do so...you could tell that story in two minutes...on the elevator ride...in a way that would be very delightful to hear...
- now switch gears...
- what is the church of Jesus Christ's elevator speech?...
 - and right now I'm not talking about our particular church although that would be an interesting discussion for sure for us and every other congregation out there...
 - but right now I'm talking about the church of Jesus Christ as an entity...
 - how did we start?...what are our historical roots?...what's our foundation look like?...
 - and is it a good story...or one that's embarrassing so we hope no one ever asks?...
 - truthfully – it's a great story...and understanding that helps us Live Life Together as a church family...
- that's what I'd like us to talk about today – **Living Life Together because Our Family Had a Great Beginning**

- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Acts chapter 1...page 91 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of me...
- this morning, we're beginning a brand new study of the book of Acts...
 - it's not so much our intent to cover every last issue in every last verse as much as it is to address the major themes and issues in this book...
 - the way this fits into our overall theme this year is that Acts is all about the founding and development of the early church...
 - it's our elevator speech, so to speak...
 - and so we can learn much about what it means to live life together as study how the early lived life together...
 - now, one "interpretational warning" so to speak...
 - the way we choose to understand the book of Acts is one of the things that separates some evangelical churches from others...
 - and I wish that wasn't so – but the fact is, we see in a glass dimly this side of heaven, so there are legitimate differences of opinion even among those who do truly love the Lord and His Word...
 - and often those differences – and again, I'm speaking between evangelicals (or conservative Bible believers) – are going to appear here...
 - and the crux of the issue is this – should we view the events in the book of Acts as normative, or transitional?...
 - in other words, there's no question that these things happened to the early church...
 - they are recorded in the inspired word of God...
 - but should we expect these same things to happen to us today (are they normative)...
 - or should we not expect them to be repeated today (because this was a period of time in church history that was transitional)...
 - it happened to them then, but we don't expect it to happen to us today...
- well, which position is correct?...our answer would be that the book of Acts is transitional...between the Old Testament...the Old covenant...God mediating His plan and program through OT Israel and ultimately their Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ...
- and the New Testament, the church of Jesus Christ, because OT Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah and King...
- so between the gospels (the offer of Christ as Messiah and ultimately His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection) and the epistles – the letters written to local churches...
 - stands the book of Acts---which explains the transition between the two economies in the outworking of the plan of God...
- and the important event that was occurring during this transition was the completion of the NT Scriptures...that didn't take place over night...
- so the message of the apostles needed certain authentication through what we would typically call sign gifts until the Scriptures were completed...but then the expectation was that the sign gifts would die out...
- that's why, by the way, the apostle Paul said... 1 Corinthians 13:8 - Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.

- you have to draw the conclusion from that verse (I think) that the sign gifts are temporary in nature...
- of course then you have to decide, how temporary---but since those words were written about 1950 years ago...you would assume that maybe that's occurred...
- but there's room for disagreement among good people of God on that point, but our view is that the sign gifts died out when the NT was completed...and we think it is significant that the NT ended with a 2-fold prohibition [don't add to or take away from]...and since sign gifts would constitute additional revelation, we don't believe that is occurring today because it's unnecessary...
 - there's more to that discussion for sure, but that's enough to point out that as we open the pages of the book of Acts...we want to learn everything we can about the foundation of the early church and how they lived life together...and emulate every last aspect of the way they lived that is appropriate for us in our day and our time...
- now, this morning we want to survey the first two chapters of the book...and look at why we can LLT because our family had such a great beginning.
- read Acts 1:1-11, 2:1-16...
 - at this point, Peter preaches his first recorded sermon...connecting the OT prophecies about the Messiah and also the eventual coming of the Holy Spirit with what was happening at that very moment...
 - because remember in Acts 1:8, Jesus said this was going to happen, and here it is...
 - but what's important to note is, the rest of the sermon is not about all of the supernatural things occurring...but instead, the importance of the men and women present repenting of their sin and placing their faith and trust in Christ...
 - let's pick up the story at the end of the sermon...
 - read Acts 2:36-47...
- that is the information necessary for our elevator speech...that's our church family's beginning...
- now, with the time we have remaining, let's look for three blessings given to the church family on the day of our birth.

I. A Clearly Researched Set of Facts on Which to Base our Faith.

- it's important to understand that the book of Acts is a personal letter...

A. Composed by Dr. Luke.

- we don't know a lot about this man, but we do know that he was a physician, and that he was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul...
- that's why we have what we refer to as the "we sections" of the book of Acts...here's a random example from the account of the first person in Philippi coming to Christ, a woman named Lydia...
- Acts 16:13-15 - And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

- and he starts the book by saying...
- Acts 1:1 – The first account I composed...
- well, what's that talking about?...the gospel of Luke...what he had carefully researched and then explained to his friend and everyone else who eventually had access to this gospel...and he also makes it clear that it was...

B. Written to Theophilus.

- now we know nothing about this man, except he is also mentioned at the beginning of Luke's gospel like this...
- Luke 1:3 - it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;
- normally a description like "most excellent" would have been reserved in Bible times for a political leader of some kind...so many students of Scripture believe that Luke was writing to an influential cultural or political leader in an attempt to encourage his friend to place his faith and trust in Christ...
- but the beauty of the fact that we still have these books of Luke and Acts shows that our faith is...

C. Focused on historical evidence.

- these are not fairy tales...
- this man was putting his name and reputation on the line in order to lay out what actually happened...events that had plenty of eyewitnesses and could have easily been disputed if they were not true...
- he investigated everything carefully from the beginning...and now he set it out in consecutive order so it would be very easy to systematically understand the claims of Christ...
- The book of Acts is the first volume of church history. It records the story of the church from its explosive beginning on the Day of Pentecost to the imprisonment at Rome of its greatest missionary. During those three decades, the church expanded from a small group of Jewish believers gathered in Jerusalem to embrace thousands in dozens of congregations throughout the Roman world. Acts describes how the Spirit of God superintended, controlled, and empowered the expansion of the church. Indeed, the book could well be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles" (John MacArthur, Acts, p. 1),
- this is a great thing for the church to be able to say as part of our elevator speech...the facts of the Person and work of Christ have been clearly and thoroughly researched by careful historians and eyewitnesses...
- why would they have given their lives for something that they knew in their hearts was not true?...
- now, what are some of the take-aways for us?...
- we can be very thankful that this is part of our heritage...this is the kind of foundation you want...
- it would be like coming across a box up in the attic that had all kinds of pictures of your great-grandparents, and letters they had written to one another, and journals they kept of their lifestyle and travels and decisions...
 - maybe you found out one of your grandparents served on the underground railroad and you had documentation of that fact...

- [cf, our family memory book – someone taking the time to record the pictures, names, stories...makes me feel that much more connected to the family.]
- appreciating the reliability of the foundation prepares us for the second blessing we were given just prior to the birth of the church...

II. A Compelling Mission to Positively Impact Others

- Luke explains to Theophilus what the apostles asked Jesus 40 just prior to His ascension...

A. The apostles' question.

- Acts 1:6 - So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"
- by the way, this is a great example of the historicity of the Bible...
- the fact that this question is recorded does not put the apostles in a very good light...and we know that because of the way Jesus responded...
- but the Bible is a propaganda instrument that tries to make the leaders always look good...
- we're not reading from a media guide...
- this is history...and the apostles are still all about the kingdom being established to Israel so they will be delivered from Roman oppression and be the ones running the show, using Christ's miraculous power to crush their enemies once and for all...

B. Jesus' gentle rebuke.

- Acts 1:7 - He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;
- that's a nice way of saying—don't be worrying about that...
- and that's one of the greatest gifts we could have been given as a church...
- a clear compelling mission that helps us not get caught up on issues that don't really matter...
- and that's what Acts 1:8 is all about...

C. The family's great mission.

- Acts 1:8 - but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses...
1. You will be my witnesses.
 - it's not about what you are going to get...it's about what you are going to proclaim...
 - do you see how Jesus has turned the conversation around...
 - and many people here would say – if I've learned anything in life, it's that this is where joy and fulfillment come from...
 - not getting for things for me (like the apostle's initial request) but by having a positive spiritual impact on someone else...the joy of being a witness of the good news of Jesus Christ...
 2. To an incredibly diverse group of people.
 - Acts 1:8 - but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.
 - the apostles would have fallen out of their sandals on this one...the notion especially that they would be proclaiming the gospel to Samaritans...
 - but that's the mission...
 - which is why our church's mission statement dovetails that...

- the mission of our church is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be more faithful disciples...
- that is an absolutely essential part of the elevator speech...
 - you have probably had people say this to you – I do as well – why does your church do this, why do you do that?...
 - that's very easy to answer – because we trying to be witnesses of the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation and new life available to every person who will repent and believe...

- we received that mission ten days before the birth of our organization...it is essential to everything we are...
- and please think about the way that has motivated people historically here in our church...

- a. let's just pick a random example....people working in the nursery...
 - why would people do that?...and some people have been doing that for 20, 30 years...
 - it's because of a commitment to the mission...
 - some might say – that's just a little thing – not in my book...
 - I have the view that one rotation in the nursery equals preaching ten sermons...
 - that's why I don't take a day off during the week [I have never viewed Sundays as work...why should others work 5 days a week at their jobs and then come here and serve on Sundays if our pastors wouldn't do the same thing?]

- b. the same is true of finances...the only way our church could do what we do around the world is because of the generous and sacrificial giving from people from our church family...
 - and I don't say a lot about that – don't have to – but even during a serious downturn in the economy, where many churches and non-profit organizations have taken dramatic hits financially...we have exceeded our budget every month for years...
 - if you started adding that up for many families in this church...they could have taken that same amount of money and bought a new car, or a vacation home, or any number of gadgets or toys...
 - why didn't they (not they may not have all those other things or more) – but why didn't they take money they believed belonged to God and spend it on themselves...
 - because they get the mission, and are driven by the mission...

- c. the same has been true in our congregation's willingness to accept and make changes...
 - let me show you something about this chart...
 - you can clearly see a particular time in our church's history when the Lord blessed us with unusual growth...and put us on a trajectory to accomplishing our mission at previously unprecedented levels...
 - and do you know what that place on the graph corresponds to...regarding what was happening in our church?...
 - it's when we made purposeful and principled changes to our music...
 - that was one of the hardest periods of time in my entire ministry career...

- that's when I concluded – and I'm just being honest here – that frequently when God's people need to be pastored the most, some of them are willing to be pastored the least...
 - I also observed that when I was asked to come here – I was asked literally by every family in leadership at the time at an interview dinner to come here and help our church become better at outreach – at fulfilling the great commission...
 - over time I became convinced that not everyone who said that really believed it in their hearts...or at least thought through the changes that would be necessary to get that job done...
 - honestly, some people still don't get it...
 - and it comes down to understanding our historic mission...
- now, you could say – but all of this is really hard...in some ways it is...bringing a diverse group of people together to accomplish these things...

III. The Supernatural Resources of Heaven to Empower Our Task

A. A promise made

v. 8 – Acts 1:8 - but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you

B. A promise kept

Acts 2:15-16 - For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: