

Witness Proclamation Plan

Acts Overview

(preached Pine Grove 3/6/16; Sunday PM)

Introduction

The Witness Protection Program began in 1971 in the US to encourage people to testify in high profile cases without fearing for their life after they testified.

The program had many problems at first, but none of the 8500 witnesses who have been protected in the program have ever been killed as long as they remained in the program...

Often times, witnesses would leave behind their lives after their testimony in court.

Though spouses and children could come, everything else had to be left behind...

Money, assets, extended family and anything else that tied them to their former lives...

In exchange, the government would provide them with a home, new name, and an income for a while until other employment could be found..

In general, the program is considered a success as numerous criminals have been convicted based on the testimony that came from people who needed protection after they testified.

However, the program has had its share of bumps and bruises..

For one, it often paid people too much to encourage them to find steady work on their own..

But two, sometimes witnesses and their families were placed in towns that were too small and made them easily recognizable.

One family had to move 3 times just because they were recognized in the first two towns they moved to..

However, today the program is still around and provides great motivation to secure important testimony and get criminals off the street..

The unspoken motto of the Witness Protection Plan is that they can make a eyewitness disappear in plain sight...

Well let me take you to the opposite idea as we look at the book of Acts tonight...

I have entitled this....

The Witness Proclamation Plan...

Because the Lord has no desire to make His witnesses disappear...

In fact, He wants the whole world to see them and know them and he wants to spread them to every town on earth...

And the book of Acts is the story of how the witnesses of Jesus' life took their testimony to the world...

The book of Acts is often called the book of the Acts of the Apostles...

Because many see it as the history of the apostles obeying Jesus' command to take the gospel to the world...

However, I think it is best to see the book of Acts referred to as the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles...

The truth is that no man can accomplish what the Apostles accomplished in getting out the good news of salvation without the help of the Lord...

And God sent His Spirit to his disciples in the first part of the book of Acts to enable them to do what would be humanly impossible...

Now, let us tie the book of Acts to the big picture of Scripture...

God began to reveal his plan for the world back in the book of Genesis..

He created the world and then He created man to rule His creation for Him.

Adam and Eve were given the task of subduing the earth and filling the earth with children and teaching them to rule God's kingdom on earth...

However, we all know what happened.

Adam and Eve forfeited that right to rule for God when they disobeyed God and sinned against him in the garden of Eden..

Ever since that day, God promised that He would eventually send someone One to rule His kingdom as it was meant to be ruled...

And we went through the OT seeing the harmful effects of sin...

And we watched as God gave His people a human king, who often disappointed them..

Yet, all the while, God was still affirming his promise to one day send a Savior..

And though it took 1000s of years, Jesus came, lived a sin free life, accomplished what Adam could not accomplish and died to bring others into the kingdom with him...

That was the story of the gospels that we looked at last week...

However, in God's perfect timing, Jesus came into a world of limited communication...

And he died a Substitute for sinners without a lot of people knowing it...

Therefore, it was necessary in the plan of God to get the word out of what happened on that cross outside of Jerusalem in 30 AD.

And God had a plan, he would deliver the message to the world through the people who were eyewitnesses..

Now, if we think about it in our day, we would just use the phone to get the gospel out or use the internet or email to get the gospel out...

However, God had 11 apostles and a handful of followers that he gave the assignment of carrying his message to the world....

And the story of the book of Acts is that the Spirit used these fisherman and tax collectors and common folk to accomplish that task...

Here is a larger map of the area in and around Jerusalem in the time of Acts..

And the outline of the book of Acts follows this map...

In chapters 1-7, Acts tells us how the gospel spread in and around Jerusalem..

I. The Witness to Jerusalem (1-7)

In chapters 8-12, Acts describes how the gospel spread in and around Israel...

II. The Witness to Judea and Samaria (8-12)

And then in chapters 13-28, Acts describes how the gospel spread in and around the world...

III. The Witness to the Ends of the Earth (13-28)

And let me make a note here...

We have covered the OT, and we realize that we don't live in that era anymore...

We see the sacrificial system of the OT and we are grateful that we can trust in the one sacrifice of Christ...

We see the Law and we are grateful that Jesus kept the Law in our place and his obedience is credited to our account when we get saved...

We also see the priests of the OT and we are glad that we now have direct access to God through His Son...

We look at the OT with a sense of relief that Christ fulfilled it all on our behalf...

As we come to the book of Acts though, we have to understand that we still live in this era of God's kingdom..

The gospel is still being spread today...

The church that began in the book of Acts is still around and we today are still a part of the church...

So, what we see in the book of Acts are our marching orders so to speak...

We see how the church is established and how it functions in the world...

We see the importance of the gospel being spread...

WE see the importance of church attendance and preaching and teaching...

The book of Acts at times is a blueprint for how we are to live in this world...

So, let us make sure not to yawn at what we see tonight...

Instead, let us make sure that we are doing what we see tonight,.

With that said, let's start in chapter 1....

I. The Witness to Jerusalem (1-7)

We have to spend some time in this first section because a lot of the good stuff is found here...

Let me read the first 8 verses of this book to get us started...

1 The first account I [a]composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had [b]by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To [c]these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. 4 [d]Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for [e]what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized [f]with the Holy Spirit [g]not many days from now."

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?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 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.”***

These verses set the stage for what follows in the book of Acts...

According to verse 1, Acts is a continuation of what Luke wrote to Theophilus in the book of Luke...

In his gospel account, Luke gives the events of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus....

And the book of Acts is really a continuation of what happened next after Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected....

The first thing he did was to appear to many people to convince them that he was in fact alive...

Then according to verse 3, Jesus spent 40 days teaching the disciples...

And it important to see what Jesus was teaching about in this period of time..

According to the end of verse 3, HE was teaching them about the kingdom of God...

That goes right along with Scriptures...

What is the theme of the Bible?

The kingdom of God with Jesus as the King over that kingdom and the salvation He provides as the way into that kingdom...

So, we can only imagine how incredible it was to hear teaching about the Kingdom by the King of the kingdom...

Yet, that is what happened for 40 days after the resurrection...

Then in verse 4, Jesus commanded to wait in Jerusalem for the arrival of the Holy Spirit...

This is so important to see and understand even though I can only touch on it now...

One of the greatest blessings of the New Covenant and the New Testament era is the fact that the Spirit of God now indwells the people of God...

Though you may not have thought about it, that was not the case in the OT...

At times, God would send His Spirit to empower people to do great things in the OT, but the Spirit never indwelt God's people their entire life...

However, in the New Testament church age, the Spirit comes to everyone who repents and believes in Christ...

The disciples are going to need the help of the Spirit to accomplish the task of taking the gospel to the whole world, and the Spirit is going to be their Helper and Guide and Power.

In fact, that is what Jesus says to them in verse 8...

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....

And then we see the outline of the book of Acts at the end of verse 8....

You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth...

And that is exactly what happened...

Now after that command went out, Jesus went to heaven in verse 9...

And the disciples went to work...

The first thing they accomplished was to choose a new apostle to replace Judas, and a man named Matthias was chosen..

Then in chapter 2, the promise of the arrival of the Holy Spirit is decided in verses 1-4...

In that incredible moment, we find the birth of the church age...

And then in verses 14-40, we see one of the greatest sermons ever preached by someone other than Jesus, as Peter gets up and preaches in Jerusalem.

Before I point out a few parts of Peter's sermon, I just want you right after the Spirit arrived and the church age begins, it is no coincidence what the first event is...

The first event of the church age is the preaching of the gospel....

And the reason we need to see that is this...

The proclamation of the gospel is what we are about as a church...

Yes, we fellowship and that is fine...

Yes, we serve others and we should...

But the primary ministry of the church is the preaching of the Word....

And it has two effects..

Number 1, the preaching of the Word moves sinners to repentance and faith in the gospel....

And number 2, the preaching of the Word shapes believers into the image of Christ...

The church should be known for biblical preaching and evangelism in all we do...

That is who we are...

We aren't a club to come and relax and make a few good friends and talk about our troubles...

We aren't a place to get some good cooking...

We are a gathering of believers who comes together to worship the Lord, hear the Word, and go out and share the truth of the Word...

Anything else gets away from our purpose as given to us by our Lord...

And so Peter stands up and preaches, and please notice what we are called to do when we share the gospel in the church age...

Look at Acts 2:37.....

37 Now when they heard this, they were [aj]pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “[ak]Brethren, [al]what shall we do?” 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance and faith in Christ is what we call people to do in this age...

That is the what John the Baptist preached, Jesus preached and the apostles preached and that is what the church preaches...

Repent and trust Christ.

That is the simple message of the gospel and we get that message from the preaching of Jesus and the preaching of the early church here in Acts..

I hear so many preachers who refuse to tell people to repent in order to be saved...

What gives them the right to change the message given to the church by her Lord and modeled by the church's first preachers?

Without repentance, there is no salvation...

Then we see something else that is very helpful for us as a church...

What did the early church do?

What was their routine?

Well, we find out in Acts 2:42...

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and [ao]to prayer.

There's the pattern for what the church is supposed to do...

Listen to preaching and teaching...

Fellowship with one another...

Enjoy the Lord's Supper together...

And pray...

That is who we are and what we do...

That pattern of early church life continues in chapter 3 as Peter and John preach together in Acts 3...

Eventually being arrested in chapter 4 by the Jewish authorities and told not to preach about Jesus anymore...

They refuse to comply but God protected them and made a way for their release...

Then in chapter 5, we find the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to God in church about their giving and were struck dead on the spot....

You would think that people dying in church would scare others off...

I mean that is not the best slogan to have for your church....

Come to church, you may die on the spot...

Yet, God continued to grow his church...

And you know why it grew?

They took sin seriously...

When Ananias and Sapphira came to church that night and lied about it...

If God had not done anything about it, most people would have expected that...

But when people see the case that the Lord has for His church to deal with sin...

And when people see the care that believers have for the church to deal with sin...

It is not a repellent to people but an attraction to people...

And how do we know that...

Look at Acts 5:14...

This is just a few verses after Ananias and Sapphires were killed for their deceit....

Acts 5:14...

14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,...

Want a growth strategy for the church?

Deal with sin biblically and graciously, but deal with it seriously and people will come...

That is what happened in the early church in Acts..

You couldn't come to church and lie to God and get away with it....

And believers should love the Lord and his church so much today that you can come to church, call yourself a Christian and be allowed to live in sin...

When the church takes sin seriously, the world notices...

In chapter 6, we see the choosing of the first deacons, which are servants of the church...

The apostles were busy preaching and praying, but some widows in the church were complaining that they weren't being taken care of...

So, the apostles find some men to serve the needs of the congregation so that they could be devoted to preaching and praying....

And 7 men were chosen as the first deacons in the church..

That leads us to chapter 7, which is the a sermon that summarizes the entire OT...

It was preached by Stephen in Jerusalem and it cost him his life after he finished preaching...

The Jewish leadership and him stoned...

I should have read this story before I signed up for seminary....

But too late now...

But we get the message...

Not just preachers but anyone who proclaims the gospel is going to be persecuted...

They killed the prophets of the OT, they killed John the Baptist, they killed Jesus, and they kill NT preachers...

When you speak the truth of the gospel, you always find trouble...

As chapter 7, we move into chapter 8 and the gospel moves outside of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria...

II. The Witness to Judea and Samaria (8-12)

In chapter 8, the gospel goes north of Jerusalem into an area of Israel known as Samaria...

It also goes south of Jerusalem to a road that takes people to Egypt, where an Ethiopian man is saved...

Then in chapter 9, we find an important event, which is the salvation of Saul, who later becomes Paul and writes much of the NT...

Saul was a Jewish religious leader and scholar, yet Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus ...

Damascus was the capital of Syria, which was a nation directly north of Israel..

After conversion, Saul became Paul and he became the primary gospel proclaimer to Gentiles...

Therefore, it is no accident that in chapter 10, we find a Gentile Roman centurion named Cornelius getting saved...

That was important because the truth of the church age is that the church is made up of both Jews and Gentiles who come to faith in Christ...

The church is not limited to Jews, and the church is not only Gentile...

The truth of this age is that anyone who repents and trusts in Christ is now part of the church regardless of their nationality...

Though we see Gentiles converted in the OT, it is important to see that Gentiles and Jews are also part of the saved in this age as well...

And then section 2 of the book of Acts ends with another death of a believer when James is killed by Herod to start chapter 12...

And that brings us to the final section of Acts, where the gospel moves beyond the borders of Israel into all the world from chapters 13-28....

III. The Witness to the Ends of the Earth (13-28)

This final section revolves around 3 trips that the newly converted Paul makes to take the gospel to other parts of the world....

In the first 12 chapters of Acts, the focus is mostly on Peter, but now that shifts to Paul...

And he becomes the vehicle to take the message of salvation to the ends of the earth...

His first trip is described in chapters 13 and 14 of Acts...

The map of that journey is on the screen...

Paul stayed pretty close to home in this journey...

First to Cyprus, then Antioch, the Iconium, then Lystra...

The important thing to understand from these missionary journeys is this...

Paul went into a town, preached the gospel of how to be saved, and then started a church there...

That is so important to remember when thinking about missions and missioanries...

The local church is what needs to be supported in mission work...

Whether that means building a church or supporting the church or strengthening the church....

And here is why that is important....

If you go into an area and share the gospel and people get saved, you can't leave them high and dry....

To just flap in the wind like a flag...

You need to then teach people how to behave like a believer, and you need to teach people what they are to do now that they are saved...

And the source for that is the teaching of the Bible in the local church...

That is how the church grows...

Take the gospel to people, watch the Lord save them, and then set them up in the church to make copies of themselves of sharing the gospel...

That is the model for missionary work in the age in which we live...

And we know that from looking at how Paul the missionary did it...

Paul's second trip to share the gospel took him farther west...

The details of that trip are found in chapters 15-18 of the book of Acts...

This is where he went north first to Derbe and then to Lystra to Troas to Philippi to Thessalonica and Berea and then to Athens in chapter 17...

Chapter 18 brings us to the close of Paul's second trip with a stop at Corinth...

But in the middle of chapter 18, Paul sets out a third time to revisit churches that he had started and to start even more...

That third trip ends in chapter 21, but we now have churches scattered all over the Roman Empire within just a few decades of Jesus sending the disciples into the world to spread the gospel...

Obviously God had been with the disciples in their ministry and the good news was getting to many ears..

But the disciples had all worked hard to be obedient to Christ's command, and now the word was spreading like wildfire...

The final section of the book of Acts details the persecution that Paul found in his missionary work...

That goes right along with the first two sections as well...

Stephen ends up dead as the gospel spreads through Jerusalem...

James ends up dead as the gospel spreads through Judea and Samaria...

And Paul ends up in prison as the gospel extends to the whole world...

He eventually appeals to Caesar, who was over the entire Roman Empire, and is sent to Rome...

And though that may seem bad, it was great as God was now making a way for the gospel to be heard in what was the capital of the world at the time...

And that goes back to what the Bible teaches...

Persecution is a bad thing for individuals but a good thing for the church...

Because persecution spread the truth like nothing else...

When the church has been under fire are the times when the church has grown the most..

And though we never desire persecution, God has used it to make His name known all over the world...

And when Acts ends in chapter 28, Paul is end Rome and look what he is doing...

Acts 28:30-31...

30 And he stayed two full years [w]in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, 31 [x]preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

What the world sees as trouble, the Christian sees as opportunity to spread the Word...

And that's the kind of eyes we need even in our day...

When people attack Christianity today and even Christians today....

Use it as an opportunity to show by your good behavior and commitment to the Lord that Jesus is real and the way to the Father...

Paul saw prison as a time to preach the good news, and that is what he did...

Conclusion

How do we summarize the book of Acts?

Well, we look around us tonight...

The word must have continued to spread, and when the Bible was completed, it spread even more....

And when the printing press was invented, it spread even more...

And when the Protestant reformation occurred, it spread even more...

And eventually it came to this nation and even down to all of us...

The gospel is still spreading even tonight...

And the church still adds to its number even tonight..

Let's end with this....

Peter was still just a young disciple, yet in Matthew 16, he and the other disciples confessed to Jesus that he was the Son of God...

And do you remember what Jesus told him after that confession?

He said, “Peter, I am going to build the church on what the confession that you just made.”

Peter, you are the first in a long line of people who will confess me as the Son of God, and those people are going to be a part of the church that I will build...

And then what did Jesus promise after that?

He told Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church...

And guess what?

They didn't in the book of Acts...

They didn't in the early years of the church..

They didn't in the Middle Ages...

And they didn't in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the gates of hell don't prevail over the church even tonight...

The church grows when it follows the command that Jesus gave it...

And the church will continue to march forward until the Lord reaches down and raptures us out...

That is the testimony of the book of Acts...

That is the testimony of history..

That is the testimony today...

But most importantly, that is the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And the book of Acts is simply given to us to follow and model as the church that loves our Lord in all ages...

Let us pray...