

THE TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER

ACTS: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH, PART 17

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 11/22/20, Matt Heerema

This week, we are wrapping up our 17-week walk through of the book of Acts. I'd like to take today's message and attempt to review the book and highlight some of the main takeaways for us as a church.

In week one, I commented that in the book of Acts we are going to find very few commands, very few specific forms and modes of operation we should do replicate as 21st century believers, but we can certainly be inspired by the example of those first witnesses. But that one of the main things we draw from Acts is that we can be encouraged by what God shows us here: that when he gives us a task, nothing will stand in our way.

As we look back on the 28 chapters of Luke's account of the early church, we find Jesus making and keeping a promises to his followers: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth..." (Acts 1:8) Notice the form of this verse. It's not a mission statement. It's not a command. It's a promise: "You *will be* my witnesses..."; and by the end of the Acts-account, we find that this has happened. And here we are, in the remotest parts of the earth, carrying that same mission.

We called this series "The Holy Spirit and His Unstoppable Church" because that's who this book is about. In Acts we find a church which, though 2000 years distant, very closely resembles ours today. We find an unstoppable, gospel-powered church. And we find the pattern of the church we are to be: a worshipping, caring, proclaiming, expanding, and never-fearing church.

I'd like to frame this as six "E's" this morning: The unstoppable church is the exultant church, the equipped church, the evangelistic church, the expanding church, the encouraged church, and the empowered church.

THE EXULTANT CHURCH

The unstoppable church is the exultant church. The worshipping church. When we first find the church gather in Acts 2, we find them worshipping.

Acts 2:42-43 (ESV)

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

Devoted to the word. Devoted to the breaking of bread and prayers. Filled with awe. The church gathers to worship. You could say that the purpose of the church is to worship! The purpose of all creation is to worship. The specific purpose of mankind is to worship the most-high creator God. Worship *is* the mission. I've heard it said that evangelism and mission work exists in order to go to places where worship is not happening, for the purpose of creating worshippers.

As I was thinking about this, I have a question to ask: If someone were to ask you "why do you go to church? Why are you a church person?" What would your first answer be? I think for so many the answer is social or personal. I go to church in order to have fellowship with my closest friends, my spiritual family. Or, I go to church to be inspired or to grow spiritually. I hope that your first answer, though, is that you go to be with the church to worship. To give honor and attention to our creator, savior, father, and friend. The triune God.

We exist to worship. We see throughout Acts the church at worship. Gathered in fervent prayer. Singing hymns in jail. Eagerly seeking direction from God. The new testament church worships.

But yes, some of those other reasons are also accurate. We see in acts that the unstoppable church is the equipping church. Acts 2:42, they were devoted to the word and prayer, and also to "the fellowship" - to one another.

THE EQUIPPED CHURCH

Caring for and providing for one another's needs, spiritually and physically.

Acts 4:32-35 (ESV)

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The Acts church works together to share their resources together, all kinds of resources, to equip one another for a life of mission. One commentator put it “the members of the church are materially part of one another’s lives.” We are meaningfully connected. We share each other’s joys and burdens. We bring each other soup when we’re sick. We share financial loads among one another. We share our understanding of the word together, we help keep each other centered in what is true. And probably most often we pray for one another - talking with our heavenly father, for our brothers and sisters.

THE EVANGELISTIC CHURCH

Another thing we see throughout Acts is that the church is an evangelistic church - proclaim the gospel message about Jesus wherever they went.

Acts 5:42 (ESV)

42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

(This verse is specifically about the apostles in context, but we also see in scenes like...)

Acts 8:4-5 (ESV)

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

The worship and fellowship of the church has an evangelistic effect! Just as much as Acts speaks of the church worshipping and caring for one another, it shows the effect: “...and the church multiplied..” - “The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

We see that as a result of the worship and equipping and caring and evangelism, the church expands.

THE EXPANDING CHURCH

I don’t mean to focus on an individual congregation’s growth when I say this. What we are seeing in acts is the “capital C church” expanding. The whole thing. All believers everywhere.

Acts 9:31 (ESV)

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

We are part of a global movement, global family, of churches of all shapes and sizes all over the world. There are more believers today than ever before in the history of the world. In 2011, Pew research center found that there were around 2.3 billion Christians worldwide in 2010. Almost 4 times as many as there were a century earlier in 1910.

In the west (America and Europe), we are often being told of the decline of Christianity. And for sure what we are seeing is a growth of those who claim “no religion”, but we also see a growth of gospel-believing churches. What we are witnessing is a clearing out of the “mushy middle” of “in name only” Christians. Be encouraged. This is a good trend.

The church is advancing and growing, and is all over the world. And this will continue to be the case. Jesus promised so:

“I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” **Matthew 16:18**

And we are given a promise and a picture of the end, this is where we are headed:

Revelation 7:9-10 (ESV)

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

And this promise from Jesus, 2000 years ago, which has been playing out ever since, and of which we are given a picture of the end helps us be the encouraged church:

THE ENCOURAGED CHURCH

Acts 9:31 (ESV)

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Church, we never have a need to fear for anything. We need fear no political regime, no ruler, no plague, no conspiracy, no persecution. That all will come, but we can face it fearlessly. With peace, and with contentment, because we know who we belong to, and who has our back. We fear no one but the Lord, and we are comforted by his Holy Spirit who lives in us.

THE EMPOWERED CHURCH

Another way of saying this is that we are the empowered church.

I want to be careful to say that we are empowered by the Gospel. The church is unstoppable because of the Gospel. I'd like to explain that, but first I want to say two things that it is not.

Oftentimes we use the term empowerment in the culture to mean that we can achieve our own goals, our own dreams. Never seek that sort of self-empowerment. It will always let you down.

In the church we can get weird and talk about "holy spirit power" as if we as Christians were able to wield some sort of "Jesus magic" to have control over our reality. That we can pray away COVID, or pray in the president we want in office, by the force of our faith, to name two recent ridiculous examples.

That is not what the Bible shows us. The Bible shows us real power, from God's Holy Spirit:

Acts 1:8 (ESV)

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

We are empowered by The Gospel. The good news that Jesus brings. This Gospel Power, which the early church was given, came from the good news about:

- **The peace of Jesus** - coming from Christ having accomplished all the work needed to restore us to relationship with God. In our sinful rebellion, we are enemies of God, all of us. But through faith in Christ's message of salvation, and through repentance and turning away from our sinful way of doing things on our own, and turning toward him in obedience - we are now at peace with The God of the Heavens! The Most High God is our friend! Our father! And we are his children! What can possibly cause us to fear or be anxious now!?

- **The purpose of Jesus** - Jesus has given us a mission. We know why we're here now! We are here to worship him, to care for one another in the church, and to bring the good news about Jesus to the rest of the world.
- **The promises of Jesus** - He doesn't just give us a mission, and then sits back and watches to see if it happens or not, he promises that it is going to happen. Walking in step with those promises, we will never fail!
- **The power of Jesus** - Jesus promises power to accomplish his mission, largely through the peace and purpose the promise of the gospel brings, but Acts also shows us clearly that he acts in the world to give us wisdom when we lack it. To give us resources when we need them. To remove barriers when we face them - all so that we will, with certainty, accomplish the purpose/mission he has given us.

And there is no safer, freer, more peaceful place to be than there. With Christ, where he commands us to be - whether on the battlefield, or in the valley of the shadow of death, or lying down in a green pasture beside still waters - we find that as long as he is with us, the chaotic battlefield, dark valley, and peaceful pasture can feel very much like the same place.

The power that the gospel brings is not the power to bend reality to our wishes. The power the gospel brings is the courage and peace to stand up with Christ in his mission that he promises is going to be successful.

That is what we see of the church in the book of Acts, and that's where we are as the church today: The exultant, equipped, evangelistic, expanding, encouraged, and empowered church.

Here we are, in a sense in the twenty-ninth chapter of Acts, at the end of the earth, on a mission, together with billions of brothers and sisters all over the world, bringing the good news of God's glory to all creation. It's a sweet place to be.

Pray with me.