

RANDY FRAZEE

4🎥 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO
SIX SESSIONS

ACTS

THE REVOLUTION OF FAITH

2-WEEK SERMON SERIES

BASED FROM RANDY FRAZEE'S
BIBLE STUDY ON THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Revolution of Faith

Week 1

(Acts 1—12)

I. Introduction

Neither the Gospel of Luke nor the Book of Acts has Luke's name directly attributed to it, there was unanimous consensus in the early Church that Luke, the physician, was the author of both. The Book of Luke is part one and contains the story of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven. The Book of Acts is part two of Luke's work and picks up right where the gospel finishes off. It tells the story of the ascension of Jesus and continues with the birth, growth, and dramatic spread of the church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Both Luke and Acts were written to Luke's dear friend Theophilus (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1). Luke was most likely a Gentile (non-Jew) and he experienced parts of what we read in the Book of Acts firsthand. We know this because Luke writes in the first-person plural using "we" for almost a hundred verses of the Book of Acts. He was there! This means that Acts was written in the lifetime of Luke and he was there when many of these things happened.

Through the New Testament book of Acts, we learn about the birth of the church and how it overtook the world to the point where today there is an estimated 2.4 billion followers of Jesus. Author, Randy Frazee calls this the *revolution of faith*. The word *revolution* carries two ideas. First, a complete change, like the overthrow of a government or social order in favor of a new system. Now, most recognizable for us is the American Revolutionary War from 1775 to 1783. Here, the United States of America gained independence from Great Britain, and it ushered in a whole new way of life.

Secondly, it represents a complete circle. You start here and come back to here. A great example of this would be the circling of the earth around the sun.

II. Teaching

The church that Jesus founded at the opening of the book of Acts carries both of these ideas, a complete change and a complete circle. The book of Acts opens, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day He was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. After his suffering, He presented himself to them and gave them many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God."

Theophilus is likely a Roman official or at least a person in high position and wealthy and he is a disciple of Jesus. Luke wants to tell him the whole story of Jesus and the spread of the church so his faith could be more certain and stronger.

A. Acts 1:1—6:7

The writer of Acts, Luke, is going to start off by connecting how his first book ended and how this new work begins. At the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus is crucified, rises from the dead, and appears to the first disciples over a 40-day period, teaching them about the new world order called the Kingdom of God.

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then they gathered around him and asked Him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom of Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.'"

Acts 1:4-8

Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem, a place we know as the Upper Room. It is here that God the Father was going to give them a gift, the Holy Spirit. As Jesus ascended back to the Father, the Holy Spirit was going to come down and continue the work of Jesus through the believers in that room. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was going to be the power source for these rather ordinary Galileans. As Paul would later tell us, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now living in you.

When this new power came upon them, they would use it to continue the revolution of the Kingdom of Jesus. Jesus commissioned them to take territory, starting in Jerusalem, where they were living, and spread it out to Judea, the region around Jerusalem, and then take it north to Samaria, the region above them, and then, bit by bit, to the ends of the earth. And this is exactly what happened over just 29 years.

So, as promised, the Holy Spirit comes down upon the 120 disciples who are huddled together in the Upper Room. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples exit the room out into the busy streets of Jerusalem, right in the middle of the celebration of Pentecost, which would have brought thousands of Jewish people from all over Jerusalem.

Peter is now boldly telling Jesus' story. From that single sermon, 3,000 new believers are baptized. The difference? Peter now has the Holy Spirit empowering him.

There are now 3,120 believers in Jerusalem. Where in the world are they going to gather? We are told that they gathered in homes. Historians tell us that the average home at that time would hold about 30 people. So, if you do the math, 3,000 divided by 30 equals 100 homes. The church was honeycombed throughout the city of Jerusalem. What did they do when they met together in these 100 homes?

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day,

they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Acts 2:42-47

Note that they devoted themselves to four things:

- 1) They devoted themselves to fellowship and to the breaking of bread. Every day, they would gather at the temple courts, which today would be somewhat equivalent to the public mall with a super religious vibe going on.
- 2) They would then gather in small groups of 30 or so in homes and share a meal together centered around the Lord's Supper or Communion. Basically, they created a sense of belonging. They were family. They were a community. They weren't alone. They supported each other.
- 3) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and prayer. When they gathered, they read out loud the Scriptures and prayed. They were growing spiritually. They were being transformed day by day into the image of Christ, both individually and corporately.
- 4) We are told that from that overflow of their sense of belonging and their growing together, they simply began to give to anyone who had need. They were serving each other and those who were living in the houses right around them. And all of the neighbors loved them. Why, of course—they were meeting their neighbors at their point of pain, expecting nothing in return.

And what was the net result? A person who didn't know Jesus was ministered to by the believers right around them, and they were touched. They would ask if they could become a part of this new family of believers, and the answer was always *yes*. The circle of belonging is complete, a full revolution.

This was happening every single day all over Jerusalem. The flywheel of this new revolution began to spin out of control. And we are given this report at the end of this first section of the book of Acts:

"So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to faith."

Acts 6:7

B. Acts (6:8—9:31)

In Acts chapter 6, the church in Jerusalem was having a hard time keeping up with the number of widows who were joining the church, not only amongst Jewish converts, but also a group of widows called Hellenistic Jews, which were women who were born in lands other than Israel. The spoke and lived like a Greek.

There was a complaint that the church was overlooking the Hellenistic Jewish widow when it came to their care, so the leadership responded by adding a new layer of workers to meet this need. And here is what they said:

"Brothers and sisters, choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer in the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them."

Acts 6:3-6

Back in the first century, under the Roman Empire, women were highly devalued. Abortion was legal and was the leading cause of death among women. Baby girls could be legally killed.

Widows were essentially forced to remarry within two years or be fined. Once married, all her property and inheritance automatically transferred to the new husband.

The believers were called to live out a distinctively different lifestyle based in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. They didn't abort their babies. They didn't kill their girls. They urged men to love their wives and to be faithful to them.

They didn't give their daughters over to be married before they hit the age of puberty. And as a result, over time, the church simply outgrew the pagans in numbers. And, on top of that, widows were allowed to decide whether or not they wanted to remarry.

This was the work that these newly elected men like Stephen performed. Women were treated with dignity. They were given a choice. The outcome? They flocked to the church in overwhelming numbers. There ended up being more women in the church than men, and the women started to marry pagan men, who then came to faith in Christ.

These new Christian families stayed together, didn't abort their children or kill their daughters, and they all grew up and repeated the cycle. Over time, the population of Christians overtook the pagan world, a revolution of faith. Amazing stuff, but how does the church spread beyond Jerusalem to the next location Jesus called them to, Judea and Samaria? Well, the story continues.

As it turns out, Deacon Stephen is not just good at waiting on tables for the widows. He's a mighty good preacher. He could bring the word. One day, Stephen gets into an intellectual argument with a group of Hellenistic Jews. Acts 6:10 tells us "They could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke."

So the group decided to stir up lies about Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin, who were a group of 71 Jewish men who the Roman government gave the local authority to try cases among their people, but they were not allowed to order the execution of anyone.

The Sanhedrin asked Stephen to give a defense, and Stephen breaks out in cadence, telling

them the story of the Bible in chronological order, beginning with Abraham, connecting everything ultimately to Jesus. He comes to the end of this talk, and he informs them that they had just killed God, Jesus.

Well, they don't like this sermon and they decide to stone him to death, even though it was not within the legal power for them to do so.

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 7:55-56

This is as close as we get to a near-death experience recorded in the Bible and the record of what Stephen saw.

Notice that he sees Jesus standing up next to the right hand of the Father. In every other instance we get a peek into the heavens, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father. Sitting denotes control, sovereignty, power, but here Jesus is standing. Author Randy Frazee thinks he is standing in honor of Stephen and believes Jesus is saying, *Stephen, you stood up for me on earth. Now I stand up for you in the heavens. Keep your eyes focused on me. We will be together soon.* A few moments later, Stephen went to be with Jesus, which is where he is, even now. Scripture tells us:

"On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."

Acts 8:1

What got the followers of Jesus to the next leg of their mission, Judea and Samaria? The answer, persecution. Bet you didn't see that coming.

But what happened once they got there? In Acts 8:4 we learn, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."

C. Acts 9:32—12:24

Jesus ignited a revolution of faith that invades the area of Syria. And this will include cities like Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Zero in on the city of Antioch. Antioch's an urban city. The trajectory of their life was bleak at best, and they certainly had nothing to give as a depleted people. So, what was life in Antioch like?

In a nutshell, the residents of Antioch lived in filth beyond our imagination. Next, Antioch is disease infested. This contamination obviously led to a ton of illnesses.

Life expectancy was less than 30 years of age—that's right, 30 years. Next, Antioch is crime ridden. The intense cultural diversity of newcomers didn't help the matters. It is estimated that the citizens were divided into eighteen different ethnic quarters in this tiny little space.

Next, Antioch was ravaged with natural and social disasters. Antioch burned entirely in large part four times. Antioch suffered through eight earthquakes that were so severe that nearly everything was destroyed, and huge numbers of people died.

At least three killer epidemics struck the city, killing above 25% of the population. Antioch experienced at least five serious famines. That comes to forty-one natural and social catastrophes or an average of one every 15 years.

Basically, Antioch is a town filled with traumatized citizens. Enter the church. These are people no doubt longing for relief, for hope, and for salvation.

It is in this backdrop that the revolution of faith enters the region of Syria. It is in this trauma filled environment that the church introduces herself. In Acts 9, as Peter and the other disciples were making their way to Antioch, they entered the town of Lydda and healed a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years. And as a result, the entire town of Lydda and the neighboring town of Sharon, Scripture says: *turn to the Lord*. The church met Aeneas at his point of pain.

Moving North to the city of Joppa, Peter raises a lady from the dead named Dorcas. And as a result, Scripture says: many people believed in the Lord. The church met the people in this community at their point of pain. Next, we find God directing Peter and the disciples to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile in a city of Caesarea to share the message of Jesus. Everyone who gathered in Cornelius's house trusted Christ and was baptized.

And Peter ended up saying, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

This revolution of faith is for everyone. The gospel meets people where they are regardless of their race or their skin color.

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men of Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks also telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."

Acts 11:19

These traumatized and depressed people, these Gentiles are finding relief, hope, and salvation. It is so significant that Paul and Barnabas set up their headquarters there and to stay put there for a year to disciple the people in their newfound faith in Jesus. It is here of all places that the followers of Jesus are called *Christians*, meaning those belonging to Jesus. At the end of Acts 11, the prophet comes from Jerusalem and predicts the coming of a famine that will take place over the Roman Empire.

This won't be the people of Antioch's first rodeo with famine or natural disasters. Remember, they will weather through five such famines and a total of 41 natural and social catastrophes. But something is different now that they have found Jesus leaning to what Acts 11:29-30 tells us, "The disciples as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. They did this sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul."

These traumatized people who have found new hope and healing are now digging down deep and helping others in Judea, which includes Jerusalem where this whole revolution got

started. They are paying it forward, which is a dominant principle that drives the Christian community. These people without hope have now joined the revolution of faith and set up headquarters to continue the spread of the message of hope and life to the ends of the Earth.

Only God could pull this off. At the end of Acts 12 we receive our third progress report. "But the word of God continued to spread and flourish." The revolution has spread to you and me across many large bodies of water and has met us at our point of pain. I know that it seems like many things are going wrong in this world. It's true. There's a lot of darkness and confusion, pain, and trauma.

But the revolution of faith is still making a huge difference in our world.

III. Application

Now, here's the bottom line. If you're a follower of Jesus, you are a part of this revolution. You belong. You're a part of the amazing family of God. You are loved. You are known. You're accepted. You're not alone. And what an amazing gift.

Secondly, you are growing. God accepts you where you're at, but He does not intend to keep you there. As you dive into His Word and pray in community like these early Christians, you, too, are becoming more and more like Jesus. In this way, you are fulfilling the destiny God set out for you even before you were born.

As you gather together with believers surrounding you, you are called to serve—to meet the needs of the people around you, paying forward the love that Christ deposited in you. And here's what's going to happen. One day, a person you helped, that you touched by your love, is going to ask if they can become a part of all of this. And your answer will be yes. Why? Because someone did this for you.

Those of us today who have embraced Jesus and have received the Holy Spirit are a part of this revolution of faith. We, too, are called to live distinctively different lives. We do not get our cues from the world, but from the Word.

We don't abort our children or engage in infanticide of our children. Husbands love their wives, and wives love their husbands. We raise our children in the teachings of Jesus.

We man our posts. We hold the line. We stand for our convictions, even in the face of persecution we are experiencing. And while doing so, we will love our enemies and those who persecute us, as Jesus commanded. In the end, it will prove to be the path to blessing and growth.

Persecution has begun in our post-Christian world. Based upon the pattern of God and His people, it will only serve to spread the message like a wildfire.

Seek out the people that God has for you to reach out to who don't think any hope is coming. Surprise them by this revolution of faith and show up on their door with Christ's love. This, my

friends, is at the very core of how the revolution of faith spread to Syria back in the first century and it is how the revolution of faith will continue to spread in our midst in the 21st century.

The Revolution of Faith

Week 2

(Acts 12—28)

I. Introduction

Acts is an encouraging book filled with hope. Because the God we meet in the Scriptures is the same yesterday, today, and forever, we can live with true optimism. We follow the same Messiah that led the early church. We are filled with the same Spirit of power who used his church to transform the ancient world. We worship the same God who loves with so much passion that he sent his one and only Son to give his life for our salvation (John 3:16).

When we come to the end of Acts 28, we realize that the completion of this account of the birth and growth of the church is not the end of the story. It is a new beginning.

II. Teaching

Grace is precisely what is driving the revolution of faith unfolding in Acts. It started in Jerusalem. God had used persecution to cause the revolution to spread to Judea and Samaria. It spread, then, north into Syria.

The revolution continues. God unleashes Paul—yes, the same guy who was behind the persecution that God used to spread the church out of Jerusalem. And this is a reminder to us that if God can use a character like Paul who is responsible for the death of Christians, he can most certainly use us with all the mistakes we have made.

A. Acts 12:25—16:5

In Paul's first of four journeys, he takes the revolution to the region of Galatia and Cyprus. The work God has called Paul to is zeroed in on two things—Gentiles and grace. When Paul and Barnabas come to another city named Antioch in the region of Galatia, they enter the synagogue, which was always their first move, to tell the story of the good news of Jesus. It is the good news of Jesus that is at the heart of the grace that is being extended to all.

Paul told them, "We tell you the good news—what God promised our ancestors, he has fulfilled for us by raising up Jesus." Now what's the big deal? In Acts 13:39 Paul tells us, "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him, everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you are not able to obtain under the law of Moses." This is the greatest news to fall on the ears of humanity since the fall of Adam and Genesis 3.

They invite Paul back the next week to talk to them more about this new movement of grace. The next Sabbath comes, and we are told that almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But the Jews were jealous of Paul's popularity. They undermined him, they

taunted him, and they contradicted him. Paul and Barnabas responded to the Jews, saying, "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourself worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles."

Paul and Barnabas, then make their way to a city called Lystra. And we have no word that they started in a Jewish synagogue. Paul is speaking and stops to heal a man who had been unable to walk since birth.

What happens next is very different from any of the other cities that the church entered. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form." They called Barnabas "Zeus" and they called Paul "Hermes" because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus whose temple was just outside the city brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

These people were Greeks who didn't worship the God of the Jews, but the pagan mythological gods that we studied in high school. They had mistaken them for the two biggest gods among the pagan gods, Zeus and his son, Hermes. Paul and Barnabas immediately shut this down and pointed the people to their mission. We are bringing you *good news*.

Paul told them, "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them." (Acts 14:5) Now when Paul spoke to the Jews, he started with Abraham. Paul goes all the way back to creation and starts there. Why? Because a good communicator meets people where they're at.

So, the guys eventually return to home base, Antioch in Syria, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

The revolution continues, but not without serious challenges. And one of the greatest challenges takes place in Acts 15. Jewish believers in Jesus who had been Pharisees were teaching people that in order to be fully forgiven and saved, you not only needed to receive by faith the grace of Jesus's gift, but you also had to be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas hightailed it out of Antioch to Jerusalem to have a meeting with all of the leaders. But it was Peter who laid down the gauntlet saying,

"No, we believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved,
just as they are."

Acts 15:11

The power of this revolution of faith is that it's just that—a movement of faith alone by the grace of God, not based on anything that we have done. The council all agreed, and the work continued.

B. Acts (16:6—19:20)

Acts 17:1-3 tells us, "When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,' he said."

Paul was opening up the Scriptures, which would have just been the Old Testament at this point, and he is showing these Jewish leaders, using their book, how it was that the Messiah had to suffer. The Jewish leaders thought that the Messiah they were waiting for would restore Israel to power over the Roman Empire, that the Messiah would be a political leader only. Paul takes him to places in Scripture, like Isaiah 53, which told us 700 years before Jesus was born in a manger that Christ had to suffer, and it was God's plan all along for him to do so.

In Isaiah 53, we read. "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors."

Acts 17:4-5 tells us that many people were persuaded and believed, but not everybody came on board. Other Jews were jealous. It wasn't that Paul's arguments weren't solid. They rejected the message because they were jealous of the momentum the Jesus revolution was gaining.

When Christians rolled into town back then, they rocked the place. They didn't just create little holy huddles and sing Kumbaya in private gatherings around campfires. No. They changed the very fabric of the community.

In Acts 19, a riot breaks out in Ephesus. Why? Because the church was changing the very economics of the city. Ephesus is the home of the Temple of Artemis, the pagan god of fertility. The head silversmith of the temple started the riot because the presence of Christians in town was affecting his bottom line.

He was making silver shrines and images of the goddess, but now that the people were coming to faith in Jesus, they stopped buying his stuff, and he gets mad and works up the crowd. But it wasn't just the trinkets they were selling. Being the temple of fertility, they were running a

religious brothel out of it, a temple prostitution, and it, too, was being shut down.

The guys were becoming Jesus followers and weren't doing that anymore. The Christians weren't doing anything wrong. They weren't even peacefully protesting the temple activities. What they were doing is discipling these new followers in Jesus in the ways of Jesus, and the people were simply starting to live differently. As a result, it started changing the way business was done in the cities where Christians were present.

Jesus designed his church to be more like a virus, the presence of God tabernacling in each one of us as a host so that wherever we go in Jesus' name, we take the transformative power of God with us. We gather together in worship to attribute worth to the One True God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who in turn infuses us with a holy identity as one who carries his name.

When we leave the building, no matter how magnificent the architecture, it ceases to be the church. The church leaves the building and takes the potency of God wherever we go.

C. Acts 19:21—28:31

In Acts 19, Paul is on his third missionary journey. Paul is in the city of Ephesus where he had planted a church. He is visiting with the elders, and he informs them of his plans to go to Jerusalem, and then states, "I must go to Rome." Why Rome? Rome is the capital city of the Roman Empire. Once the gospel hits Rome, it'll spread to the ends of the earth. But both his trip to Jerusalem and Rome were going to cost Paul personally.

"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me. My only aim is to finish the race and to complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

Acts 20:22-24

Then he lays this on his friends. "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again." This tore these folks up. At the end of chapter 20, we have this tender moment as Paul is about to leave. I want you to listen in. "When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. And what grieved them the most was his statement that they would never see his face again."

The people in the city of Tyre urged Paul, through the Holy Spirit's prompting, not to head to Jerusalem. But this did not deter Paul in the least. He knew his mission. In chapter 22, Paul arrives in Jerusalem. He simply tells his story, his encounter with Jesus.

They're about to flog him, beat him with a whip of leather thongs with pieces of bone or metal attached to the end, when Paul informs them that he is a Roman citizen. A Roman citizen could not be flogged.

Instead, in chapter 23, Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin Council. Once again, Paul has

an opportunity to share his story, which is really the gospel. They plot to kill him, which is precisely what everyone told Paul would happen.

But he gets confirmation from God of his mission:

"The following night, the Lord stood near Paul and said take courage. As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

Acts 23:11

But before they can lay hands on him, Paul is transferred to the city of Caesarea for his case to be heard by Felix, a Roman governor appointed by the emperor to lead over the region of Judea. In chapter 24, Paul is given the opportunity to share his story before Governor Felix.

Now, Felix likes Paul and decides to leave him there for two years. But after two years, Felix is replaced by a guy named, Festus, who wants Paul to stand trial back in Jerusalem.

Paul submits an appeal to Caesar. He wants a shot at sharing the gospel with him. A few days later, Governor Felix gets a visit from King Agrippa, a Jewish leader who ruled over the region of Galilee.

In chapter 26, Paul gets a chance to share his story before King Agrippa. Paul is laying it on this guy.

"King Agrippa says to Paul, do you think that in such a short time, you can persuade me to become a Christian?"

Acts 26:28

At the end of the story, King Agrippa conferred with Festus and made this conclusion. He says, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment. This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." (Acts 26:29-30) Paul knew that he would be released. He would be set free.

In Acts 28 Paul finally makes it to Rome. He is placed under house arrest, which came with a Roman guard. And three days later, he has a group of people over to the house. And he's back at it again. He's sharing his story, his encounter with Jesus.

The book of Acts ends with our final report, "For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

Paul surrendered his will and look what happened. History tells us that Paul was beheaded for his faith in Jesus at the hand of the Roman Empire, but not before he gave witness to the resurrected Jesus.

Today, the Roman Empire is gone. But Christianity is still alive and vibrant. There are over two billion Christians alive on earth today. Clearly that witness has reached us. And for those who have taken hold of this amazing gift, we not only inherit eternal life, but are called to continue the spread of this good news.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8

Like Paul, we are called to share the story of our encounter with Jesus and how it has changed our life. This is the call of God on our lives. He is calling you to salvation. He is calling you to an encounter with Him. Some of you have waited as long as you possibly can. Will you finally surrender to his call?

III. Application

There is reason for confident optimism about the future of the church. God's plan to reach the whole world with his love, truth, and hope is still intact. There might be cultural resistance and bumps along the way, but the Book of Acts tells us that this has always been the case. Surprisingly, there was greater resistance to the message of Jesus 2,000 years ago than there is in most places today.

We live in a graceless and conflicted world. It has always been this way. When God's people hold to the truth and wrap it in the amazing grace of Jesus the Messiah, people of all sorts are willing to investigate the person of Jesus and the mission of the church.

There is a contagious nature to the love of God and grace that Jesus came to unleash. Christians are called to get near people from every walk of life . . . close enough to spread the viral goodness of our God.