

(English) Story of the New Testament

Lesson 3 (Part 1) - The Mission of the Kingdom

I'd like to welcome you back to the story of the New Testament. We're going to continue with lesson three, the Mission of the Kingdom. We'll begin on page 28 in your handout.

Remember, as we tell the story of the New Testament, we start with an understanding of what was happening from the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament. What was happening during the 400-year period, the 400 silent years. What was happening historically? What was happening culturally? What was happening politically? What was God doing to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah? This is the preamble to the story of the New Testament.

Then we have the Gospel of the Kingdom. We talked about that in Lesson 2, understanding the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the coming of the king and the conquest of the king.

Lesson three will focus on the Mission of the Kingdom.

Lesson four will focus on the Hope of the Kingdom.

Beginning on page 28 ... We looked at the gospel of the kingdom, with a focus on the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We saw the coming of the king, the king's conquest over sin and death, and we defined the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is Jesus as our king, It is God's people in God's place under God's rule, living out his purposes. We should ask those who we share this story with, "have you entered the kingdom?" "Have you accepted this invitation to enter the kingdom?" "Have you placed your trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ's death on the cross for your sin?"

Let's continue the story of the New Testament as we focus on the Mission of the Kingdom.

This story will be told through the book of Acts and the 21 New Testament epistles from Romans all the way to Jude. We will focus on the church, the new community that Jesus established at Pentecost with the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. We will also talk about the global mission that Jesus gave his church.

There's a paragraph in the middle of page 28, with an introduction to the Book of Acts.

"After Christ's resurrection from the dead, he informed his followers of their mission to go throughout the world and tell all of the new covenant. They had the joyful task of announcing to both Jews and Gentiles that anyone could be redeemed and reconciled to God because of Jesus Christ's substitutionary death on the cross for their sins. The book of Acts records the spread of that good news during the first 30 years following Christ's resurrection."

As we begin this Lesson, it's good to first look back to the gospel of Luke. I will read Luke 1:1-4.

"And as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all the things closely from some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught."

Luke was the author of the gospel of Luke and he took it upon himself to do an orderly study. He talked to eyewitnesses and recorded all that Jesus had done and said as he prepared his disciples to continue the work when he would ascend back to heaven after the resurrection.

What we see in Acts chapter 1 is a continuation of the work that Jesus started.

Let's read Acts 1:1-14

We see that Luke is the author of the book of Acts.

"In this book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father. You heard from me that John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they had come together they asked him, Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?"

He said to them, it is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And when he had said these things as they were looking up he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white robes and said, men of Galilee why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives which is near Jerusalem a Sabbath day journey away and when they had entered they went up at the upper room where they were staying Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the women and Mary the mother of and his brothers."

That is Acts 1:1-14.

In the gospel of Luke, Luke writes an account of all that Jesus did and had started to do before he was taken up to heaven. Here in the book of Acts, Luke is continuing to write about the work of the early church.

For 40 days following his resurrection from the dead, Jesus continues to teach his disciples and reassure them that he is alive.

He continued to teach them. About what? About the kingdom of God! He was preparing them to lead this mission of sharing the gospel with the world. The disciples gathered together and committed themselves to prayer. They obeyed Jesus and were waiting in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit to come. At that point, the church will be birthed and they can begin the work of making disciples of all nations.

Acts 1:8 provides us with an outline for the book of Acts that leads geographically away from Jerusalem.

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

At the bottom of page 28 you can see this outline explained. The gospel begins to spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth.

The mission of the church in Jerusalem is told in Acts chapters 1-7 and it covers a span of years from 33 to 35 AD.

The mission of the church expands into Judea and Samaria in Acts chapter 8 – 12, from 35 AD to 48 AD.

And beginning in Acts chapter 13 through the end of the book in chapter 28, the mission of the church spreads to the ends of the earth from 48 to 52 AD.

The Book of Acts focuses first on the ministry in Jerusalem then moves into Judea and Samaria and then under the Apostle Paul it moves to the end of the earth.

Turn with me to page 29.

Here are a few foundational elements for the book of Acts. There is map that supports what we will read in Acts 2:7-12. Notice that this missional nature of the church was present from the very beginning at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes upon the church. You are familiar with Acts 2. When the day of Pentecost arrived the believers were all together in one place and suddenly from heaven came this roaring sound and what seemed like tongues of fire landed on all the believers. They began to speak in these different languages. There were people in Jerusalem from many nations. These people had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.

Let's read Acts 2:7-12 after the people begin to hear the disciples speaking in all of these foreign languages.

"They were amazed and astonished saying are not all these who are speaking Galileans how is it that we hear each of us in his own native tongue? There were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians. We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. And all were amazed and perplexed saying to one another what does this mean?"

And some were mocking them saying that these men were drunk. We know that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter stands up and shares the first sermon, the first gospel presentation of the church, and three thousand put their trust in Jesus.

The map at the top of page 29 shows where all these people came from. God had brought them from all these different places around the Mediterranean Sea to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. The gospel was shared and three thousand people put their trust in Jesus. They all traveled back to their own lands. These believers were transformed people. They were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This missional nature of the church was birthed at Pentecost. The church was birthed with a missional mindset.

The church's first ministry was among the Jews in Jerusalem. The church begins to grow. There were some issues that need to be resolved among the Hebrew and Greek believers. In chapter six deacons were established to care for the needs of these people while the apostles remained focused on the ministry of the Word and prayer. Persecution broke out in Acts chapter 8 and the church was scattered. This followed the stoning of Stephen.

The gospel now begins to spread to Judea and all Samaria, In Acts 9 we read about the conversion of Saul who would become Paul.

In Acts 13, the gospel begins to spread to the ends of the earth as Paul begins his three missionary journeys.

These are summarized on page 29.

The first missionary journey covers Acts chapter 13 – 14. New Testament books that were written during this time were Galatians and James.

The second missionary journey covers Acts 15 – 18 and 1st and 2nd Thessalonians were written during this time.

Paul's third journey covers Acts 20:18 through 21:16. Romans and 1st and 2nd Corinthians were written during that journey.

The map pictured at the bottom of the page gives you a sense of how the missional nature of the church started at Pentecost and then follows the outline in Acts 1:8, flowing from Jerusalem to all Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth all around the Mediterranean Sea. It is still going to the ends of the earth even today.

Turn with me to the top of page 30. Here is a diagram or a picture that can be used for telling the story of the Mission of the Kingdom. The top line shows the book of Acts written between 58 to 63 AD. In the book of Acts Jesus is preached. The book of Acts is a series of 10 sermons. The little boxes show the major events throughout the book of

Acts from the birth of the church, to Paul's first, second and third missionary journeys, to the trials of Paul, his first imprisonment, his release, and second imprisonment when Paul is executed. The church then continues to expand.

At bottom of the diagram, you see the Epistles written primarily between 44 and 90 AD. These are the epistles of Paul as well as the General Epistles. In the Epistles or the letters, Jesus is explained. These books contain the doctrine or teaching of the church. You can see a picture of Paul writing these letters as carried along by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote letters to 9 churches. Paul wrote letters to 4 pastors. There were 5 general letters (James, 1st and 2nd Peter, Hebrews and Jude). In addition to the writing the gospel of John and Revelation, John wrote 3 letters (1st, 2nd, and 3rd John).

In the middle of the diagram, I included a few pictures to depict this mission of the kingdom starting with Pentecost. The gospel moves from Jerusalem to Samaria. I show Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Samaria. The church obeys the command to go and make disciples. The gospel is beginning to spread from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. There is the conversion of Saul leading to Paul's missionary journeys. At the end of Paul's life, he is persecuted for his faith in Christ. He is in prison yet the gospel continues to move forward and he writes four letters from prison, (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon). These are some of the most joyful and transformational letters written when Paul is in the most challenging circumstances. The gospel continues to go forth boldly and fearlessly. There is a picture of a dove to represent the Holy Spirit who empowers all of this kingdom work and brings glory to Jesus as the head of his church.

In the middle of the page is a paragraph that summarizes the 21 New Testament letters.

"The Epistles or letters of the New Testament record doctrinal truth related to the new covenant. These 21 letters give all the information needed for Christians to live as new covenant people. These letters record commands, principles and standards that govern the lives of those who claim to have entered this new relationship with God based on Christ's work on the cross."

You can see that 21 of the 27 New Testament books are these letters or epistle. These represent 75% of the New Testament. There are two main groups of letters. We call them the Pauline epistles (Romans to Philemon) and the General epistles (Hebrews to Jude).

There are 13 letters that Paul wrote, called the Pauline Epistles. They were written to churches and to individuals. The letters are ordered in our Bible from the longest letters to the shortest. There are 9 letters written to churches and 4 written to individuals.

Paul's letters can be grouped into four categories according to the dates that they were written:

- 51 and 52 AD - Galatians and 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.
- 53 to 56 AD - Romans and 1st and 2nd Corinthians.
- 60 to 62 AD – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. These were written when Paul was in prison, and they are known as the prison epistles.
- 62 to 67 AD - Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus. These letters are known as the pastoral epistles written during Paul's release from prison and during his second imprisonment.

As you turn over to the top of page 31, there is a summary of the General Epistles. There were 8 letters not written by Paul. They are called the General Epistles because they were addressed to the church in general not to specific individuals or to a specific church. They are also arranged in the bible from the longest letters to the shortest letters. The titles are based on the names of the authors (James, Peter, John, Jude, and the author of Hebrews is unknown. These are also grouped into three different categories.

- The Judean epistles – Hebrews, James and Jude.
- The Petrine or the Peter epistles – 1st and 2nd Peter.
- The Johanan or epistles of John – 1st, 2nd and 3rd John

There are two main themes to focus on as we tell the story of the Mission of the Kingdom.

First there is the understanding of the King's new community, the church.

The second is the King's global cause or mission that he has given to his church. This is Matthew 28:18-20. "Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I commanded. And I am with you always to the end of the age."

On the bottom of page 31 you see our chart that can be used to tell the story of the kingdom of God. The storyline of the New Testament starts with the Gospel of the Kingdom. It is followed by the Mission of the Kingdom. The books include Acts all the

way to Jude. The King's new community and the King's global cause are described. The question for us to be asking is are we advancing the kingdom? Are we participating in the work that God has called us to do?

Turn with me to page 32 as we discuss the King's new community. When we teach this course in a group. I will ask the group to read Acts 2:41-47. I give them time in a group to identify the characteristics of this new community.

I will read this passage and ask you to pause the recording to make a list of characteristics of a healthy New Testament church.

Acts 2:41-47 follows the Peter sharing the gospel and 3,000 people put their trust in Jesus.

"Those who received the word were baptized and there were added that day about 3,000 souls. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came over every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Pause the recording here and write down the characteristics or the marks of a healthy church.

There are a number of marks of this new community, the church.

- They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is the Spirit of God moving within the church.
- They were devoted to the teaching of God's word.
- There was godly leadership, they are devoted to the apostles teaching. Today we have elders and pastors that God has called to oversee a church.
- There was a focus on fellowship, care and love for each other.
- There was a focus on breaking bread. This was a reference to the Lord's Table or Communion. They were they were focused on the two ordinances of baptism and Communion. In verse 41 baptism was recognized. The Lord's Table was a remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection until he comes again and

baptism was an outward symbol that showed that people were brought into community and they were baptized into the body of Christ.

- Prayer was a focus of this new community.
- Worship was present. They were filled with a sense of awe as they gathered together.
- Generosity was a way of life. People gave generously they realized that God owned it all and they were called to be stewards of what had given them.
- They focused on evangelism. God was adding to their number daily.
- They gathered together as a large group. They met in the temple courts. And they met they met in homes. They met in small groups. They lived life together, studying the Word of God, encouraging each other.

The church is the body of Christ on earth. Where is the actual resurrected body of Jesus today? He is in heaven. He has ascended and he is reigning from heaven today. He is interceding for the church today. And he is coming back again. We are his body. Though we are many we form one body.

The church possesses the authority of Christ. In Acts 1:8, we receive the power to be witnesses for Christ. In Matthew 28, all authority was given to Jesus, and he has passed that on to every believer to go and make disciples of all nations.

The church is called to embody the love of Christ. There are many references for the church to love in the same way that Christ has loved us. As we love this way, the world will know we are followers of Jesus.

The church completes the sufferings of Christ. So often we focus on the glory but we are also called to share in the sufferings of Christ. Jesus said in this world you will face trouble, you will face persecution but take heart, I have overcome the world. Jesus did not say that his followers would never face difficulty. He said in the midst of difficulty, we can experience joy and peace. God uses our suffering to conform us to the likeness of Christ, transforming us into his likeness.

The church is to display the glory of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, The Holy Spirit is at work in us day by day. We are being transformed with ever-increasing glory. Unlike Moses whose face was radiant when he was in the presence of God but the glory would fade, our glory is continually growing from day to day.

The church is called to be on mission for Christ. We are to go and make his excellencies known, to declare who Jesus is, to declare his praises, to proclaim the good news.

How would you like to see your church community continue to grow and mature?

Where is your church strong and where can it develop, by God's grace?

Take time to pray for your church.

- Pray for the leadership of your church, your elders, pastors, and ministry leaders.
- Pray for the community around you that your church might shine brightly and make Jesus known.
- Pray that the things that we read about in Acts 2:41-47 would be evident in your church.
 - godly leadership
 - focus on the Word
 - focus on fellowship and love and care and service
 - focus on maintaining the ordinances of the Lord's Table and Baptism
 - focus on prayer and seeking God's face together
 - focus on worship
 - focus on generosity
 - focus on bold evangelism
 - focus on community and not forsaking the meeting together in large groups and small groups
 - and to see that the Lord is adding to our number daily those are being saved.

This is a summary of the new community of Jesus. It started with the birth of the church at Pentecost.

Let's end part 1 of Lesson 3 here and we will pick up with part two as we continue with the Mission of the Kingdom and discuss the global mission or global cause that Jesus has given his church.