**Transformed: A Survey of the Book of Acts**

**Weeks 1 & 2 (January 9 & 16, 2019)**

**Helpful Background**

1. The book of Acts has it all; amazing miracles, direct Divine intervention, great sermons, great escapes, action, mystery, and adventure. Acts serves as the bridge between the gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, which tell us about the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus Christ; and the Epistles written to instruct, encourage, and challenge the Church. ((The Epistles were letters written by Paul, Peter, James, John, and others.) Acts will hold your attention, spark your imagination, and stir your emotions. (And the best part, it’s all true!)

2. The book of the Bible known to us as Acts, has also been called, “The Acts of the Apostles,” because it includes the early teachings and ministries of the apostles. It has also been known as, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,” because the presence, purpose, and power of the Spirit is clearly evident in the book. The theme that runs throughout Acts, is the Holy Spirit powered miracle of changed lives. God shows His power, through the Holy Spirit, by dramatically changing lives. He starts with the apostles; Peter, James, John, Paul, but also changes many lesser known faithful ones; Lydia, Cornelius, Timothy, in order to build His Church.

3. Acts is part 2 of the gospel of Luke. *When last we saw our reluctant heroes, they were frightened survivors of a brutal crucifixion, and had abandoned their Lord. Then, they witnessed an incredible resurrection, and were restored to fellowship with the Risen Christ.* In the book of Acts, we learn “what happened, next.” We learn how Peter, James, John, and the others, were transformed; from cowardly to courageous, from selfish to selfless, and from ordinary followers, to extraordinary leaders. We watch as God forms the foundation, and begins to build, His Church.

4. Luke is the author of Acts, as well as the gospel. Luke was a Gentile, (non-Jewish) convert to Christianity. He was a doctor, and had been trained as a scholar, observer, and historian. Luke probably interviewed many of the original disciples and others who followed Jesus when he wrote his gospel. He became acquainted with Peter, and later, traveled with Paul on several of Paul’s journeys. (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, 27:1-, Col. 4:14, 2 Tim. 4:14) Although the author of the book is never mentioned, Luke’s authorship has never been questioned. Many literary and stylistic links exist between Acts and Luke, and the early Church authorities attribute both books to Luke. (Luke 1:1, Acts 1:1, and the use of “we,” beginning in 16:10, and continuing throughout the book.)

5. Luke researched the reports about Jesus. He stated his purpose in writing both books as; “I have decided to write a careful summary for you, to reassure you of the truth of all you were taught.” (Luke 1:1-4, acts 1:1) Luke’s research, in combination with his personal connections to Peter and Paul, gave him access to abundant, and accurate information.

6. Both Luke and Acts are addressed to “Theophilus,” which literally means, “friend of God,” or “lover of God.” This fact has caused some to conclude that the books are written to a general audience, and were not written for a specific person. However, many Bible authorities have pointed to the term, “most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3) to prove that Luke was writing first, to a specific Roman Gentile (This formal term was only used to address Roman officials.) Bible scholars have surmised that Theophilus was a new believer, but also a powerful Roman official, who needed to be confident that His new Faith was well grounded in reality. Beyond those inferences, not much is known of Theophilus, as there are only two mentions of such a name in all of scripture. As in all of the Biblical letters, there was an original audience, but because God was involved in inspiring the writing, we have it for our encouragement today.

7. Acts was probably written between 62-65 AD. The book concludes with Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, (62-64,) but does not mention any widespread persecutions of the Church, which took place in 66-67 AD. In addition, Acts does not include any mention of the deaths of Paul or Peter, (66-67) nor the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. (70 AD) The gospel of Luke includes the words of Jesus about the destruction of the Temple, (Lk. 19:41-44, 21:20-24) so Luke would have mentioned the fulfillment of these statements if they had happened when he was writing.

8. Acts also carries on a message from the gospel of Luke; in that, the Gentiles are included in God’s salvation plan in Christ, together with the Jews. Acts describes the growth of Christianity among the Jews, and then throughout the Gentile world.

9. The book of Acts provides a genuine, truthful, account of how the Church began, and how it grew. The growth of the Church, detailed in Acts, demonstrates that God’s Good News of salvation and hope applies to every person. Luke provides evidence that the gospel is available to all; Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, rich or poor.

10. Luke wanted to summarize and record, not only the “acts” of the apostles, but also their teachings, which define the gospel message. Acts highlights the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection, as proclaimed courageously by the followers of Christ. He records the words of Peter, John, James, Paul, and many others, who declared fearlessly the truth about Christ. Luke also records the travels of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others, that led to their teachings being communicated throughout the known Roman world.

11. Early in Acts, Luke sets out a geographic outline for the narrative, in the words of Jesus; “and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The early followers of Christ are told to wait in Jerusalem until they are given the Holy Spirit, and then God will begin to build His Church. He will use the efforts of the apostles, as well as other faithful followers of Christ, first in Jerusalem, (Acts 1-7,) then in Judea & Samaria, (Acts 8-10,) and then to all of the known world. (Acts 11-28)

12. In Acts, we find a narrative that helped unify the early Church, which was made up of diverse groups; Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, slaves, free, and many varied ethnic groups. Acts emphasizes the Lordship of Christ, the power of the gospel, and details the common ground that unifies all diverse Christ-centered groups. Peter, James, and Paul, the apparent leaders of the differing groups, agree to grow the Church in unity, and to utilize their differing gifts and ministries to build ONE Church. (Acts 15:1-35) Although growing pains still occur in the early Church, Luke shows that one “body,” under the headship of Jesus, goes beyond the desire to survive, and begins to thrive.

13. The Church today, faces many of the same tensions as the early Church we read about in Acts. In a troubled, skeptical, world, the gospel must be practiced and proclaimed with courage. We need to reassure new believers that the gospel is trustworthy and powerful, and help non-believers understand that Christ is relevant and real in our world today. The Church cannot become sidetracked by internal disagreements, and should rather, unite around a core of the gospel message.

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**Week 2 (January 16, 2019)**

**Review Questions**

1. (2:1-4) When/what is Pentecost? Why were the believers together? What had they been told? What happened? What did it look and sound like? What happened?

2. (2:5-11) Why were so many Jews in Jerusalem? How did they react? What caused them to be open? What was their response?

3. (2:12-15) What was the response of the majority of people? But what did the negative minority say? Who stepped forward? What did Peter say first?

4. (2:16-21) What did Peter teach? From where? How had this prophecy come true, and what part hadn’t yet? How is 2:21 reassuring?

5. (2:22-28) How did God the Father endorse God the son? How did God have a “prearranged plan?” How did it happen according to Peter?

6. (2:29-33) To whom was David referring to in the previous section? What happened? Of what are the disciples the witnesses? Who promised the Holy Spirit and how did the promise get kept?

7. (2:34-36) What then did Peter teach? What quote did he use and why is this important? How did he explain the quotation? What did God proclaim and accomplish in Jesus?

8. (2:37-41) What was the response? What did they ask? How did Peter respond? How do you become a disciple/follower of Jesus? What happened? What was the end result of a Holy Spirit powered day?

**So what?**

9. How did the Holy Spirit come to the early Church? What happened? How is this different from modern Church experiences and why is it different?

10. How was Peter changed? What did he cover in his first sermon? What “evidence/fruit” of the Holy Spirit is there in the Acts 2 Peter that wasn’t evident before? How is he different?