

God's Plan in the Book of Acts

God's Plan in Scripture

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Probably all of us have had the experience of reading a book or watching a movie and arriving at the scene where the entire picture starts coming together. Maybe it's a particular chapter or a pivotal conversation between key characters in the movie but all of a sudden the lightbulbs start coming on and you now understand the significance of what seemed like an obscure detail back in chapter 1 or the importance of a character who made a brief appearance at the beginning of the movie. It's like the picture on the front of the puzzle box is coming into much clearer focus. Sure, you have to read the rest of the book, sure you have to watch the rest of the movie but it's that point at which you smile at the ingenuity of the author or the creative wisdom of the film maker. You say to yourself, "I just love the way he/she is pulling all of this together."

In many ways, the book of the Bible that accomplishes that feat most clearly is the Book of Acts and I want to invite you to turn there in your Bible this morning. We're actually going to be starting in Acts 1. That's on page 91 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

This summer, we're doing a series entitled "God's Plan in Scripture." This is an overview of the entire Bible in ten weeks. I really appreciate the marvelous job our various staff members have done with their presentations. We have a very deep bench around here and, honestly, that's critical for an organization like ours for dozens of reasons. I should probably tell you in advance that I love the Book of Acts. In fact, I would strongly encourage you to find time to read this great book in its entirety, preferably in one sitting. Before you fuss at me about that, that would be the replacement of one goofy television program. So, emails on that topic not particularly welcome.

I really want to encourage you to find the time to do that. That would be a great help to you and a great help to us as we prepare ourselves for what God has for all of us this fall. I spoke to you last week about this matter of fall readiness, the cultivating and anticipatory heart that is excited and trained and deployed and focused on how we can advance our God-given mission in this community day after day and Sunday after Sunday together this fall. I promise you, reading through the Book of Acts will help you in that process of preparation.

You might say, “You know, Steve, you made a very similar statement when you spoke on the Poetical Books a few weeks back. You talked about how you love them and you encouraged us to read those books too. Ok, that’s true, you’ve got me. In fact, maybe I ought to just come out with this confession: I love the Word of God, every last bit of it and I hope you do to. I honestly hope it’s one of your greatest treasures not just because you would answer that way on some sort of a doctrinal exam but because your lifestyle proves that to be the case. I hope you would say with the Psalmist, “I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and I’ll regard your ways.” In other words, I’ll do something about it. “I shall delight in your statutes.” Do you realize you choose the object of your delight. “I shall not forget your Word.”

In fact, when you’re done reading the Book of Acts, I know you’re going to do that, I would encourage you to read and then reread Psalm 119. That, too, will help you in this matter of fall readiness because one of the keys to all of us in advancing the ball as much as possible in the remaining months of this year, whether we’re talking about in our families, our school, our work, our community, our world, our church, is being men and women who are guided and directed not by our emotions, not by our circumstances, not by the ever-changing opinions of people but by being individuals who are guided and directed by the sufficient and life-changing Word of our God. So, I hope you treasure it. I hope you treasure it.

To our purposes this morning: we’re talking about God’s plan in the Book of Acts and we’re looking for seven key words to help us understand, remember and apply this marvelous book of the Bible. Let’s start in Acts 1:1 and if you treasure your Bible you’re going to lock on now. Ready for that?

“The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach.” I probably need to stop right there. Who is the “I”? It’s Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and also the Book of Acts. What’s the first account that was mentioned there? That would be the Gospel of Luke. These books were designed to be read together, Luke/Acts. Who is Theophilus? Well, he’s a friend or acquaintance of Luke’s. Many think he was a political or maybe a cultural leader. No one knows for sure but Luke, this medical doctor, by the way, has carefully researched and chronicled the story of the birth, the life, the teaching, the ministry, the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ in hopes that his friend would make a decision to become a Christian, to become a follower of Jesus.

With that in mind, look at verse 2, “Until the day when Jesus was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders.” Note that: there’s a lot of command that goes on in this text. “To the apostles whom He had chosen. To 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.” Note that 40 days reference. “Gathering them together, He commanded them,” there that is again, there’s authority here, “not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had

promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” There’s a promise.

“So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.’” Now, verse 8 is the key to this entire book, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses,” there it is, “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Just push the pause button on that to be sure we’re all on the same page. You have Jesus Christ 40 days after he had resurrected from the dead at the Jewish feast of the Passover making this incredible promise to them, “You are going to, in the future, receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” Cue the place in the movie where an obscure statement made several hundred years ago by a man named Joel all of a sudden makes complete sense. And he says, “You will be my witnesses.” Again, I tried to point out: notice, the repeated emphasis on Christ’s authority in our lives. He says, “You’re going to be my witnesses.”

It’s an incredible privilege, “that you have been chosen to be a witness of the Gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and the actual new life that is available to all who will repent and believe and you’re being sent,” Jesus said, “to your own people.” That is, to those disciples who were Jewish, “You’re being sent, you’re going to be witnesses to Jerusalem and Judea,” which is amazing because it was the Jewish nation that had just killed him and hung him on a cruel cross. And yet, the resurrected Christ is directing his disciples back to be witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea. How scandalous is that?

Then keep reading because it intensifies, “And to Samaria.” Heavy ethnic overtone there. The people that the Jewish nation had rejected and hated because of their ethnicity, considering them to be half-breeds, unworthy of their concern, “You’re to be witnesses to them, too.” Think about what’s happening in our culture right now with the Trayvon Martin case; think about what’s on the front page of your newspaper this morning. If the Bible is not relevant, the problem is not the Bible, the problem is you. It ought to take our breathe away because it was breathed out by the Spirit of God. “To Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and,” he says, to this rag-tag group of people, “to the uttermost part of the earth.” Seriously?

Verse 9, “And after Jesus had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’” In other words, Jesus is gone and it’s time to get to work.

In the next verses and we obviously can’t read it all, in the next verses the disciples replace Judas, the one who had betrayed Christ with a kiss and then took his own life. Then in chapter 2, we find the promise that Jesus just made in Acts 1:8 begin to come to pass. Listen to this, 2:1, “When the day of Pentecost had come...” Pentecost, another

Jewish feast, which would've been 50 days after the Passover or 10 days from when the conversation we just read had occurred, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues." You say, "What?" Well, many times if you don't understand something in the Bible, just keep reading and it becomes very apparent.

Verse 5, "Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' In other words, they're not smart enough to know our language. "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?" And there's a whole number of ethnic groups listed there who are hearing the Word in their own language.

Verse 11, "Cretans and Arabs - we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.' And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, 'What does this mean? But others were mocking and saying, 'They are full of sweet wine.'" There's always a cynic, you know? Get drunk and then you can speak in a way that others hear you in their own language that you've never studied.

Well, what happens next? The answer is that Peter gives his first recorded sermon. Sermons are good, huh? Absolutely they are. Maybe not this particular one but sermons in general. And we can't read all that either, you'll read it this week as part of your reading of the Book of Acts in place of those goofy television shows. Here's just a piece of it, Acts 2:22, ""Men of Israel, listen to these words," Peter is speaking now, "Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." That's called preaching the Gospel, not tickling the ears of those who were listening, not addressing your felt needs and begging you to find a small place in your already wonderful life for the presence of Christ. It was confrontational, truth-filled preaching from the Word. You might say, "Well, what word? The New Testament hadn't been written yet." Hold that thought. That's going to become important when we talk a little bit more about this matter of tongues.

But what we see Peter do in the rest of his message is go back to the Old Testament to show how the death, burial and resurrection of Christ fulfilled the plans and purposes and promises of God. And then he goes on in this sermon to call upon them to repent, a word we don't hear near enough of in the average evangelical church in this country. Repent which means to acknowledge your sin, acknowledge you're on the wrong path and turn around, change what you think about yourself. Peter said to them, "You think you can

earn your way to heaven on your own. You need to repent of that and then to cry out to Christ for forgiveness of sins and for the kind of new life that is only available in and through him.”

It goes all the way back to what we discussed early in this series: it’s possible to receive the gifts that were forfeited in the Garden. In Christ, it’s possible to have a right relationship with God and a right relationship or understanding of yourself and a right relationship with others and a right relationship with your environment or your circumstances. But on that day, the day of Pentecost and on this day as well, it requires a decision made at a point in time to repent and believe. And then, after salvation, subsequently, to be baptized, to publicly demonstrate the genuineness of the decision that you have made and the salvation that you have already received.

That’s why we read the way this sermon concludes is this: “Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart.” The Word has a way of doing that, you know? When the Holy Spirit’s involved and his Word is being proclaimed, that’s what happens. “And said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ 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. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.’ And with many other words,” that’s something else about sermons, lot’s of words, good sermon. “With many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’”

Now, you might say, “Did anybody take him up on that offer? I mean, who’s going to listen to that?” Well, remember Jesus not only made the promise that we just read a moment ago in Acts 1:8, he also made another promise prior to his death. It’s in Matthew 16 where he said to Peter after Peter had made the great confession that “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.” Jesus promised “upon that rock, that confession I will,” do what? “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overpower it.” This is the day that was fulfilled.

Look at Acts 2:41 now, “So then, those who had received Peter’s word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” On the day of Pentecost, the birth of the church. “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” And if you look down at verse 47, the way this chapter ends, “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” What an incredible book that talks to us about how God fulfilled his promise to build his church.

So, with the time we have remaining, think about seven key words to help us understand and remember and think about contemporary applications of this marvelous book of the Bible. The first has to be the word “promises.” Many of the promises that were made in the Old Testament are beginning to come true. That’s why when we see these Apostles speaking in tongues, Peter begins his sermon like this, “Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: ‘Men of Judea and all you who live in

Jerusalem,” by the way, where were they supposed to be witnessing? It’s already happening to Jerusalem and Judea. “Let this be known to you and give heed to my words. ‘For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day.’” If you’re making that accusation at the ninth hour, it might’ve been true but it’s only the third hour of the day. “But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel.” And if you take me up on my suggestion to read through this book, you’ll see time after time where Luke or whoever is being alluded to at the time, goes back to a specific promise that was made in the Old Testament that is now being kept.

I would just remind all of us, that can be greatly encouraging to people like you and me today because in the Bible we find what Peter would later refer to as “great and precious promises.” Are you glad for that this morning? Undoubtedly you’re in one or more situations right now where you’re in between a promise being made to you by God and that promise being fulfilled and you might even be saying in your heart, “I don’t see how that could ever come to pass in my life.” If you’re in that situation, I would say to you this morning, remember the Book of Acts because many things that seemed impossible from the vantage of the Old Testament are coming to pass in amazing ways and sometimes at amazing speeds. Please don’t ever forget that the same God who kept those promises then will most assuredly keep the ones he’s made to you now and in the meantime we choose to walk by...what did they name this place? Yeah, walk by faith.

The Book of Acts is about promises made. More promises, more promises. I said, the key verse in the Book of Acts is Acts 1:8. It’s a great verse to memorize” “You’ll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come, you’ll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, even to the remotest part of the earth.” That’s an incredible promise. I mean, how is this rag-tag group of men and those women who were part of the group as well, how were they going to be witnesses to their city and to their region and to people they hate, the Samaritans and to the remotest part of the earth?

This is one of my favorite verses of the Bible, is Acts 17:6, you may know this verse, it’s just a little parenthetical, “When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who turned the world upside down.’” Do you hear that? We’re not even out of the Book of Acts and people are accusing. This is a derogatory statement, they’re accusing the followers of Jesus as having such a powerful impact, they’re turning the world upside down.

That’s also where this outline in your program comes in. It shows how Acts 1:8 is actually fulfilled throughout this book. And so, in the first 8 chapters you see them begin witnesses to Jerusalem and some marvelous things are happening as a result of the power of the church. And then you see, as a result of persecution starting, them being spread out to Judea and even to Samaria. That is a miraculous statement, the fact that the church is that powerful. And then you see the beginnings of the missionary movement of the church where they’re going out to the ends of the earth.

So, the point is, the Book of Acts is all about promises. Promises made and promises kept. You might say, “What transformed them?” I mean, you’re talking about individuals

who just 50 days before were filled with fear and timidity. Peter, the guy who's preaching the sermon 50 days before was doing what? Was denying that he even knew Christ. What is it that transformed them? And what might people like you and me need to be ready for the fall?

Here's the answer: the resurrection. That's the second key word when you think about the Book of Acts is the resurrection. They finally came to understand the absolute necessity for the Lamb of God to die in their place. They weren't good enough to save themselves and the fact that the Savior would be the Son of God himself, beautifully explains this mystery from the Old Testament. I mean, how could the Messiah both die for the sins of man and also be our living, victorious King? There's only one way. There's only one way. He had to be an infinite person who could, therefore, pay a finite price and then be miraculously raised from the dead. And that's why a central element of the Apostles' preaching and, by the way, a central element of ours will always be the bodily resurrection of Christ. That was the centerpiece of what Peter was saying even in this sermon.

"But God raised Him up," he said, Acts 2:24, "having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible for him to be held by death. For David says," don't lose that, Peter in his sermon goes back 1,000 years to one of the Psalms, "David says concerning of Him, concerning the Messiah, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'" And then Peter says, after quoting that Psalm of David, "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." You've opened it, you've seen his remains. "Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ," it all fits together, "that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are..., what? "Witnesses."

How amazing it is. If you know your Bible, you know the first time Peter heard about the resurrection of Christ, he made a really colossal theological error. Remember? Right after Jesus explained that he would build his church, he went on to explain to the Apostles the only way I'm ever going to be able to bring a group of people together in the church is if I first die for your sin and then be raised from the dead. Do you remember what Peter said on that day in Matthew 16? "Not so, Lord." Wrong answer. In fact, what did Jesus say to him after that? "Get thee behind me Satan." When your theology professor writes that on your exam, that is a bad answer.

And yet now, Peter is completely transformed because he has finally put it together in his brain, the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I think that brings us to a couple of very important questions this morning. One of them is: Has there been a definite time in your life where you admitted your need? You humbled yourself? You acknowledge

your sin and then you placed your faith and trust in what Jesus Christ has done on the cross for you and you have asked him to be your risen Savior and Lord. If not, I would encourage you to do that. To do that today, just like they did 2,000 years ago.

Christian friend, I want to ask you this, seriously now: Is there evidence in your life today that you really believe in the resurrection of Jesus? Is there evidence? Can you point to words you've said that only made sense this week if Jesus really is alive? Were there steps that you took that would make absolutely no sense at all unless you really believed that Jesus Christ was resurrected? Were there opportunities that you embraced that no one would embrace unless Jesus really was resurrected? What proof is there practically in your life that you believe in the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ? It doesn't have to be big things, it's just in the day-to-day conversations and decisions we make.

We've had our daughter, Bethany, our oldest daughter and her husband, Rob, and their son, Liam, with us and we've had a great time together. How marvelous that is. So, we have a little baby in the house. We also have a special needs son, Andrew, who's 20 and if you know Andrew you know, just like all special needs sons or children, there are certain things they just struggle with. In Andrew's case, he really struggles with baby sounds. I'm not just talking to you about crying, I'm talking to you about any baby sound. It drives him just crazy. We can go into a restaurant, even though he's 20 years old, and he'll pick that out and when we sit down at the table, his head will immediately go down and we know exactly what's happening. There's a baby somewhere in the restaurant and there's nothing wrong with a baby being in the restaurant but those sounds for some reason just drive him crazy. He'll start sweating, he's trying to control himself from just lashing out, etc. So now, in my house the last couple of weeks, I've had my new little grandson and a special needs son who finds baby sounds just grate on him.

Last Sunday we were in the pool and we had Liam in the little inflated ring and here's my son, Andrew, I'm dragging him around the pool, floating him around, singing him piratey songs. That night, I'm putting Drew to bed and I just commended him for the great job he did at loving his nephew and showing hospitality to his nephew. And he said, "Well, Dad, be kind one to another." I had not quoted that verse to him but do you see what happened? Here's a special needs son who several years ago placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ and who believes that his Savior is alive and in his special needs kind of way, who believes that Jesus Christ is alive and, therefore, believes that his Word is true and when he's really struggling, can go to his resurrected Savior for help. I would just say that if a special needs child can do that, his Daddy better get with it, huh? It was convicting to me and perhaps it's convicting to all of us. As we consider the message of the Book of Acts, do we really believe that Jesus is alive?

Third key word is the word "church." As we've already pointed out, the church is born in Acts 2 and throughout the rest of this book we see Jesus fulfilling his promise made in Matthew 16. And what we learn theologically is that God is mediating his plan and program in and through the local church. For example, we get to the missionary journeys and what do we see Paul and his associates doing? They go into a town, they proclaim the Gospel to the Jewish men and women who are there, if they reject it and they typically

would, they would go out to anybody who would listen, when those persons repented and believed, they were baptized and they were organized into a church. That's why we read Paul, for example, saying at the beginning of the second missionary journey, "After some days, Paul said to Barnabus, let us return and visit the brothers in every city." What's the point? They wanted to go visit the young churches.

Think about your Bible, the rest of the New Testament is comprised of letters that are written to local churches or to leaders of local churches. Even when you get to the final book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, that book has seven specific letters written to seven specific churches. God is mediating his plan and program in and through the local church today. We're living in the age of grace and that's why as we think about this matter of fall readiness, I would encourage everybody here to think about your level of involvement and commitment to your local church. And I say that without apology because if what I just said was accurate, that God is mediating his plan and program in and through the local church, then I would ask you how much are you planning to have your life in sync with what God is seeking to do in our community and around the world?

That's why, by the way, Faith West, why are we going to have church services there? The answer is we want college students to be comfortable in church. And you say, "Is it just going to be college kids?" Absolutely not. We want there to be young people, we want there to be older people there. You say, "Are you gonna do some of that organ type music at Faith West?" You better believe it. And I'm not here to criticize other campus groups but I'm simply saying if all you do with college students is cater to their thing and they're all around college students all the time for their four years or whatever, what's going to happen when they get a job and go out somewhere else? If they're not comfortable being part of a body, if they're not comfortable being part of a church, they're not going to be able to transition into the next aspect of their life well. You have to decide that that doctrine of the centrality of the local church, that drives the decisions that we make.

There's also, do you love the fact that this church is diverse? That God wants there to be people from different ethnicities as part of the church. And when you think about what's going on in our country right now, when you read the front page of your newspaper this morning, I hope you would want to say, "I'm so glad that God wants us to be a group that is ethnically diverse, where we would not tolerate prejudice around here for a second." Why? Because the resurrected Christ is powerful enough to help us love one another in spite of whatever difference might come into our heart as a reason to treat another person in a sinful fashion.

Another important word when you think about the Book of Acts is the word "transition." And I realize you might have some questions about this matter of tongues. The text makes it clear what's occurring: a person is speaking who did not know the other languages and people from a variety of ethnic groups are hearing the Word in their own language simultaneously. It would be like this: let's say you only spoke German and you only spoke Spanish and you only spoke French and here I am up here and I only speak English and not that very well, and yet I was preaching the Word in my broken English

and you were able to hear it in your own tongue simultaneously. That's exactly what the gift of tongues was all about.

You say, "Why did it happen?" Well, several reasons: to authenticate the message the Apostles were proclaiming prior to the New Testament being completed; to demonstrate that God loves the nations and he wanted every nation to hear the Gospel; thirdly, regrettably to be a sign of judgment on the Jewish nation that had rejected him because he's now speaking to and through other nations. Which is why the Apostle Paul, though he said tongues will die out, he said that in places like 1 Corinthians 13, but he didn't want it to. He didn't want tongues to die out and the reason is because that would be a sign of judgment on the nation of Israel at that particular period of time.

If you want to learn more about that, I would encourage you to read the book "Charismatic Chaos" by John MacArthur and I realize that's a rather provocative title. I have a lot of charismatic friends in this town and we just disagree on the use of sign gifts. And if you want a thorough treatment of that, that's the book I would strongly recommend.

Transition. We don't look at the Book of Acts as being normative in all ways, which is why we go to the epistles to determine what we ought to be doing as a church today.

Another key word with this book, I have to be honest with you, it's the word "problems." You might say after the church was launched, did that solve all the problems? Nope. You bring a diverse group of people together and you're going to have some fuss in it. Like this one, Acts 6:1, "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution." Can you imagine that, people fussing in the church house? Yeah, I can imagine that. And what's instructive to note here is that the Apostles did not discard the church. The Apostles came together and they prayerfully came up with a solution that could continue to allow the church to function well. And if you know your Bible, you know that that's when the office of deacon was instituted as a result.

Another example, I just don't have time but it's a great one, is Acts 15 where some were upset because people like Paul had been out preaching to the Gentiles and it's a great example of a church business meeting. It's a great example of the church coming together and solving a problem but the point is, people didn't take their ball and go home. People didn't say, "Well, I don't care about the church anymore." They said, "Because we understand God is mediating his plan and program through the church, we're going to communicate and get that handle."

Problems come up all the time. Let me just throw one out there, you probably may not like the fact that I'll mention this one, but this has actually been in my face the last couple of weeks: the issue of allowing babies in our worship services. I hear about that all the time and here's the bottom line, here's the challenge: how do we have an atmosphere that is conducive to people listening to the Word and yet simultaneously being family friendly? There's no easy answer to that but here's our answer: we built a nursery and so

we provide loving, compassionate care for babies. We also have some spots around our building where you can watch these services remotely but we don't allow babies into our worship services because we want everybody to hear the Word of God. We value it that highly and I realize you may not like that answer, God bless you, but the bottom line is, just think about this, there are problems constantly coming up in the church and it's our privilege and our responsibility to solve them.

Here's another key word, it's the word "persecution." The first deacon, a man named Steven, is actually stoned to death in Acts 7 and then you have this madman named Saul who's actually going around persecuting the church. And that's one of the challenges that God lays out as there are times when you, as a follower of Jesus Christ, will have to pay a price. Some of our missionaries right now are in very dangerous places but they're serving Jesus because they believe in the power of the Gospel message.

You even find this great text in Acts 5 where you have Peter, who is actually flogged because of their witness for Christ, they order them not to speak in the name of Jesus, they release them and the passage goes on to say "they went out their way from the presence of the council rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name." And I hope you would say, "Listen, if I have to deal with a little ridicule, if I have to deal with a price, it doesn't matter because I believe the safest place in all the world is the center of the will of God and I love Christ and I love others and I believe in the power of the Gospel message so much that I'm going to live it and I'm going to proclaim it. And if a price has to be paid, then bring it on."

One last word but it's very important and it's the word "unfinished." The Book of Acts ends very abruptly. Did you know that? What happened to Paul? What happened to Paul? He just kind of drops off the face of the earth. The answer is that the Book of Acts is not about the Apostle Paul. The Book of Acts is about the resurrected Christ fulfilling his promise to build his church.

There's a group of churches in our country that have taken on the name "Acts 29 Ministries" and the point of that is, God's not finished. You can now be part of the movie. You can now be part of what God is doing in and through his world today. That's why I want to encourage you to take some time to review our strategic ministry plans. We're going to be talking about that on August 4th, at our church family night and you can go online right now and download the current status of those 150 initiatives that you have recommended. What's Acts 29 look like for us? You can also watch a video that walks you through the strategic site planning for all the properties God has given us, 5, 10, 15, 25 year plans. It's really important for you to know what we believe our church family is seeking for us to do because we're actually going to ask our church to vote on that, approve it finally in September. So, I hope you'll take some time to make yourself aware of what we believe our congregation believes God would have us to do in these coming days.

Are you glad for the Gospel? Are you glad for the fact that Jesus is resurrected? And are you glad for the fact that he's glorifying himself by drawing other men and women to

himself and then organizing them into local churches? Are you glad that God has made you part of that? I hope that you think about the fall. I hope you'll ask yourself: If this is true theologically, what would that mean about the way that I would function in these coming days?