

To the uttermost...  
*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*  
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There is an old adage when it comes to preaching and teaching the word of God that oftentimes what we know as good doctrine doesn't make real good preaching and sometimes really good preaching isn't really good doctrine, and what that means is tonight we're gonna get some really good doctrine but it may not be real good preaching, so I'm warning you in advance. Tonight, we're gonna look at three very specific passages within the book of Acts and the reason I want to do so tonight is for multiple reasons but the first and the primary one is this, as I addressed this morning, as we're walking through the Scriptures as a family of faith, the book of Acts begins with the Gospel going forth to the Jewish community, and the last half of the book of Acts is primary to the Gentile community, and one of the things that we see is Jesus made a statement in Acts 1:8 that the apostles should wait for the filling of the Holy Spirit and that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. However it is the book of Acts that at least in my limited life experience has caused more trouble, more difficulty and more issues within the body of believers than probably any other book in the New Testament, and the reason that I believe that is so is because it is what I would like to call tonight a transitional book. You say, "What do you mean a transitional book?" It transitions us from the law unto grace. It transitions us from the synagogue to the church body. It transitions us from the apostles to you and I.

So as we walk through these early 30 years, the first 30 years of the church of Jesus Christ, at times we find ourselves and when I say "we," I'm speaking collectively as the Christian community harboring in or specifically hanging out at one specific passage and at some points in disregard for others. So tonight, we're gonna have some extensive reading from the book of Acts in chapter 2, 8 and 10, and lest you worry how long the reading will last, the individual who had the privilege of establishing the seminary that I spent nine years of my life at, the great Dr. B. H. Carroll, every time he would stand up to preach, he would read Scripture for 45 minutes and then he would preach. Aren't you glad my name is not B. H. Carroll?

So Acts 2, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of

a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. 12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. 14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

Now I'm gonna forego the message that Peter preaches that day. Although it is not great in length, I'm hoping tonight that you are familiar with this famous Pentecost sermon. I want to fast-forward to verse 37. It says,

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

That is the account of the Gospel witness, the message of Jesus Christ going into every nation by way of what we know as the Jewish people.

Now I'm gonna ask you to fast-forward to the book of Acts 8. The book of Acts 8, we find ourselves immediately after what we addressed last Sunday evening with the martyrdom of Stephen, and we know from this passage that one who we'll later know as Paul the apostle actually consented unto his death, but in Acts 8, we're gonna read all verse 1 through 25, we have the account of the Gospel going to the Samaritans. Now this is critical for multiple reasons. Number one is this: this was the most despised group of people among the Jewish because they were hybrids, they were half-breeds. If you thought, number 2, that the Gentiles were suspect of the Gospel, the Samaritans were more suspect. Beginning in verse 1 it says,

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. 4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city. 9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. 14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased

with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. 24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. 25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Now I want to encourage you for our last passage, to the book of Acts 10. This is the story of Cornelius and his conversion, a man, a Centurion of the Italian band, a man who according to the early parts of chapter 10, feared the Lord, gave alms and prayed. He cries out to God to hear the truth. At the same time, we know that Peter has a vision of the Lord of which that famous four-knotted sheet is brought down with all of the unclean animals and God tells him, "Do not call unclean that which I have declared to be clean." It was more than a vision regarding culinary aspects, for the Lord was communicating to him that even the Gentiles, the unclean ones, could be recipients of salvation through Jesus Christ. When we get to verse 34, we're at Simon the tanner's house, Cornelius and his group is there, Peter and his group was there, and we're about to have an amazing interaction that will set the pace for the rest of the book of Acts. It says,

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. 36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) 37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. 44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Now you and I have just experienced a very extensive reading of the Scriptures but we have read the account of the Gospel going to the Jewish community, we have read the account of the Gospel going to the Samaritan community, and we have read the Gospel or the account of the Gospel going out to the Gentile community, and I have for you tonight a very extensive piece of data on the screen. It's a chart that I have labored over to try to make simple that which we have just read because as we read what we read, we know that the Gospel went to all people but I think we could all testify that it looked a little different each and every time. So hopefully we have the font large enough tonight but I want to walk through this very quickly with you. I'm gonna go left to right in the account of Acts 2, Acts 8 and Acts 10, and then I'm gonna show you or demonstrate some differences within the accounts, and then come to a conclusion at the end of what this means for you and I each and every day of our lives.

You'll notice on this chart that I've divided it into several sections. Now I'm gonna see if this works. I feel like John Madden. Are you ready? Look at this. Check that out. Yeah. You turn me loose with this on Sunday morning, I may never leave. Okay, that being said, I want you to see that I put certain subheadings here for all three of these passages and I think it's important that we see how these issues are addressed, not only the principal characters but the participants, in other words, who's doing the speaking and who's doing the listening. The issue of the laying on of hands, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the speaking or the hearing of tongues, and what we know as baptism. So those are the subject matters of which we're gonna walk through in all these passages.

So let's begin with Acts 2. The principal characters. We know that Peter was the voice of that famous Pentecost sermon, but we also know that there were a group of people of about 120 that were in the Upper Room that time with him for seven days. We know that the apostles whom we know, the original apostles we know about 120 and then the Bible also says that there were a group of women who were gathered together in Acts 1. Why is that important? Because it was not only the apostles but also a group that we might call disciples. They were not the original apostles but they were a part of those first and early believers.

Who were the participants? Jews from all nations. We talked about this last week, they represented every people group on the planet, and even though they were lost, they were religious. You'll notice that nowhere in Acts 2 did anybody lay hands on anybody to receive anything. It's nonexistent in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit, it takes place in their lives, the participants' lives after their baptism, and 3,000 are added.

The issue of tongues. Those who spoke with tongues and those who utilized this incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit were the preachers, and it was a group of lost Jewish doubters and questioners who watched, shall we say, from the balcony.

The baptism that took place in Acts 2:38 was in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins.

If that is the only account we have the Gospel going forth, you and I would have a very clear formula, would we not? The problem is when we get to Acts 8. In Acts 8, the principal character is a man by the name of Philip and though we're grateful that he was one of the first deacons, he was not an apostle. He was not one who witnessed the beginning and the entirety as well as the conclusion of the ministry of Jesus Christ. In fact, if you'll remember when the apostles gathered in Acts 1 to replace Judas, the qualification was someone who had been there the entire time who had witnessed it all, and even though Philip did not have that distinction, he was a man full of faith and full of the Spirit. He was called as one of those first seven deacons.

Those who heard the message. They were, as I said, they were the Samaritans, in particular we have a man by the name of Simon the sorcerer. Again, just like in Acts 2, they were lost individuals but they weren't religious, they didn't grow up in the synagogue, they weren't familiar with the Torah and the prophecies of Jesus Christ, they were secular and, shall we say, pagan or heathen at best.

Then it comes to the laying on of hands. Simon thinks that the laying on the hands brings the Holy Spirit. Simon the sorcerer, the pagan and heathen, is the one who believes that there's something supernatural with the laying on of hands. The Holy Spirit comes after Peter and John show up. Now I want you to just let that percolate for a moment. The Holy Spirit did not come on them as in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit doesn't show up until Peter and John arrive on the scene, they both happen to be apostles, and it comes after those who are baptized.

The issue of tongues. Nowhere to be found. Acts 2 they're speaking in tongues, hearing this gift. Acts 8, there's no expression whatsoever and it just so happens, and this will be important in a moment, that no Jews were present.

The baptism in the name of Jesus. There's no explicit mention of for the remission of sins like in Acts 2:38.

Acts 10. The Gospel goes to the Gentiles. Who is the principal character? Again we have Peter the apostle.

Who are the participants? They are Gentiles and we have believing Jews, and the reason that that is important is when we get to the end of Acts 10, the testimony of the believing Jews when they return to Jerusalem was the verification, was the proof that, yes, even pig-eating unclean Gentiles can go to heaven too. But it was the Gentiles, particularly Cornelius, one of the Italian band, he would've been the picture of a pagan in the apostles' day. These were lost individuals, secular but religious, religious in the secular sense of paganism and heathenism.

Again, in Acts 10 nobody lays hands on anybody and the Holy Spirit, here's what's interesting, the Holy Spirit comes on them while Peter is preaching and it comes before they're baptized.

What about the issue of tongues? Those who received the gift were the participants, not the preachers. Now circle that real big. Do you see a difference between this passage and chapter 2? In chapter 2, the demonstration of tongues was by Peter and the apostles as a testimony to the unbelieving Jews, by the time you get to Acts 10, the tongues issue is those who are the participants, not the preachers, but it is a testimony to the Jews who are present.

The baptism is in the name of the Lord. I've given you references obviously to him being Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and they have received the Holy Ghost.

Now you may be wondering to yourself, why all this information and what is so important? I would dare say that tonight even though it's been roughly 500 years since what we know as the Reformation, even though it's been 2,000 years since Jesus Christ rose from the grave, what is before you on this chart explains all of the multitude of denominations in a differing expression of what we know as Christianity because we, and I say "we" collectively as the Christian community, we have a really bad habit of finding a verse or a passage that we like, we spend all of our time in that one and we never take a step back and say, "What is the whole picture here?"

So tonight on a very less, shall we say, verbose slide, I want to share with you some conclusions about this passage. The first one is this, that this incidents, the going forth of the Gospel in Acts 2, Acts 8 and Acts 10, they exactly follow the geographical expression that Jesus gave in Acts 1:8. Jesus told them, "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall be my witnesses." Who is the "you" there? The apostles. "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea," which is the area around Jerusalem, "Samaria," the hybrids and half-breeds, "and the Gentiles, the unclean."

Let me ask you though it may be rhetorical: were the apostles witnesses in all three areas? Absolutely. In fact, one of the things that's interesting, of course they are the preachers in Acts 2, but don't you find it interesting that the Holy Spirit doesn't come on the Samaritans until the apostles are there? What did Jesus tell them? "You will be my witnesses. You will see this. You will testify to this." And in Acts 10 when it comes on the Gentiles, there are apostles there to witness it. So what Jesus laid out in Acts 1:8 at a worst case, most conservative level had completely been fulfilled by the time we get to Acts 10. It had gone to the uttermost. It had gone to the furthest stretches of humanity.

2. The office of the apostle is present when the Holy Spirit "arrives." This is important for multiple reasons of which primary is this, Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses when the Holy Spirit goes forth in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth." And even though we see the Holy Spirit operating uniquely in all of these scenarios, the apostles were present when he arrives.

3. And if you want to get something controversial started in a discussion over coffee in the morning, just bring this up: tongues are a secondary issue, not primary. There's a lot within under the umbrella of Christianity that wants to make the issue of tongues whether

it be the speaking or the hearing, one of, if not the most important issue. If you'll notice, it's not the most important issue.

I'm gonna ask that we go back to the original slide for just a moment. I want you to see something here. What we know as tongues, oops that was a bad mark. I apologize for that. There we go. I guess Sunday night football has no fear of me taking over tonight.

If what we know as the expressions of tongues was absolutely vital to the proclamation of the Gospel and to the necessity of salvation, then why did the Samaritans not experience it? Do you see where I'm going with that? Because there are those who would say and I have met those who say that if you have not spoken in tongues, if you do not speak in tongues, then you haven't done what Acts 2 says. My question is, then what do you do about Acts 8? Because there's no one in Acts 8 who remotely speaks and/or hears what we know as the expression of tongues.

I'm gonna ask that this chart remain up on the screen for the fourth comment. Is the laying on of hands inconsequential? Notice here in chapter 2 and in chapter 10, nobody lays hands on anybody. I'm not trying to throw rocks through glass windows but there are communities of faith across our land who will have a time during their services where they have select people set aside to lay hands on other individuals hoping that it will impart to them some special gift and/or the speaking of or the hearing of tongues. The problem is that only takes place in Acts 8 but not in Acts 2 or Acts 10.

Now you may be wondering to yourself in spite of information overload, why is this critical and why is this important? I don't know about you but I just believe the Lord has a sense of humor, and I think that the Lord sent forth the message of Jesus Christ to the Jews the way they would receive it, the Samaritans the way they would receive it, the Gentiles the way they would receive it, and he did it differently every single time so that you and I can't come and say that's the only way. We don't have that ability and yet oftentimes there are those, even ourselves, who find ourselves guilty of saying, "Well, if it doesn't happen this specific way, it must not be the right way."

The second thing I want to draw your attention to is this: which one of those three lines are you? You're Acts 10. I don't know if any of you grew up in the synagogue going to Hebrew school. I doubt that many of you are truly what the Bible would call a Samaritan. In fact, I would say that not just the overwhelming majority but it would be an extreme statistical outlier to find anybody within our community, particularly our family of faith, who does not follow what we know as Acts 10.

You say, "Well, why is that significant?" Because Acts 10 follows the formula that we preach, we teach and we believe even in our local context. Allow me to summarize. When the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed whether it's in a mass communication or a one-on-one conversation, according to Acts 10, that when the hearer repents and believes, they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit immediately, there is not the necessity of the speaking of a tongue, there is not the necessity of laying on of the hands, but the Holy Spirit comes and resides within them upon their profession, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and

baptism is an act of demonstrating on the outside something that's already taken place on the inside.

So what we see as baptism is not a necessity for anything for the Lord to take place as far as soul in eternity. The speaking of, the hearing of tongues is non-relevant to one's salvation. And the laying on of hands has nothing to do with anything. As you walk through the rest of the book of Acts in these next couple of weeks, you will see Acts 10 laid out time after time after time again. When you get to the letters of Paul, you will see Acts 10 laid out time after time after time.

Finally, I mentioned that the book of Acts is a transitional book, oftentimes found difficult by many. I appreciate those who go back into Acts 2, I appreciate those who go back into Acts 8, but as I alluded to last week, if we're going to address the question, we must first have the answer. That being said, you and I from Acts 10 follow a prescription of the Gospel, and though we're grateful that it went to the Jews in Jerusalem, and though we're grateful it went to the Samaritans in Acts 8, everyone that you come into contact with will be Acts 10 and following, which means don't get caught up in the minor issues, don't be distracted by things that some may make major issues when Acts 10 has them as inconsequential or minor at best.

And I don't know about you, but as we come to our time of response, aren't you grateful that 2 Corinthians 11:3 is true? You say, "I don't know what 2 Corinthians 11:3?" The Apostle Paul says this, he says, "I am marveled and I am bothered that you have removed yourself from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." I think oftentimes in our culture we try to out-think the Lord, we try to somehow make it more complicated than it actually is. I'm gonna speak on behalf of the male gender tonight, there is a stereotype of us that we try to put something together first and then we look at the directions. That's my household. I'm guilty as charged. When we read the directions of Acts 10, it's a pretty simple formula: we hear the truth of Jesus, we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells within us, and then we testify to the world around us through what we know as baptism. Ladies and gentlemen, let us not make it more complicated than it is.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed as we approach a time which we know as an invitation. It's a simple invitation. It's an invitation to those who are lost to be found, those who are in sin to be forgiven, and those as Scripture says that are headed toward a place the Bible calls hell to be redirected toward a place the Bible calls heaven. And I know it's Sunday night and I know statistically the majority are saved, but I also know there's a lot of folks on the other side of the camera, there's a lot of people that are listening on the radio, and maybe even someone in here who somehow, some way has missed the simplicity in Christ Jesus. Hopefully tonight we'll serve as a reminder to all of us. And if you're that person today, let me encourage you to do what we spoke of many times: believe the truth in Jesus, call out, repent of your sins, ask him to save you. The Holy Spirit will dwell within you, your life will be changed for all of eternity.

*Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you that we don't have to have multiple degrees to understand the Gospel, thank you that even though it first went*

*to the Jews and then the Samaritans, that you saw fit in your plan of salvation for even us Gentiles to hear the truth. Thank you that each and every one of us here if not in this context, at some point had somebody share with us the simple message of Jesus Christ and, God, forgive us if we ever have or we ever have an inclination to make it more complicated than it truly is. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm gonna ask you to stand with me as Brian leads us, whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.