

In our sermon series, **The God Story**, we are now approaching **Chapter 10 – The Church**.

We have been seeing how God’s story unfold as we have walked through the OT and Gospels now into the story of a growing church.

Each perspective, each moment, and each part of the story **has something new to show us**.

Our focus today will largely be on the Book of Acts, and the God Story puts it this way:

Acts will go on to tell the story of a people so broken open by the Spirit that they will go places their feet have never gone (width) to form families with people they previously have never known (depth), or wanted to know. Luke provides the thrilling account of how a small, persecuted Jerusalem sect will emerge and multiply to become a worldwide phenomenon.”

In Acts 1, we see **Jesus still among His disciples** before ascending to heaven.

Before He leaves, He gives them **one final command**—a command that sets the course for everything that follows.

To help us visualize this, **look at our map** of Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (*Acts 1:8*)

Seeing things **up close, from a distance, and in between** shapes the structure of **Acts** and, by extension, the **New Testament**, and understanding this verse unlocks the framework of nearly the entire **NT**.

As we move through Acts, we will follow Jerusalem growth to Judea and to the ends of the earth.

Open your Bibles as Jesus gives this instruction to his disciples in Acts 1:4...

<sup>4</sup>...“**Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.**

The key word here is **wait**.

Jesus tells His disciples to wait before stepping into the mission.

Why wait?

Because He knew that human zeal alone could never accomplish what the Holy Spirit can. They needed to wait for the promise of the Spirit.

So much of what we do—whether as individuals or as the Church—is driven by our own zeal and energy. But Jesus makes it clear: **wait**.

Wait for what **God** is doing before deciding for **God** what should be done.

Wait for what **God** is doing before deciding for **God** what should be done.

The disciples wait for over 10 days.

I wonder how often we decide God isn't speaking because we waited a whole 10 seconds.

But the disciples, waited and God responded on this day.

**Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.**

The day of Pentecost is part of the Feast of the Weeks, it's a Jewish festival where pilgrims come from all over Israel to gather in Jerusalem.

It is in this place that the Old Covenants and promise of Israel meets the New Covenant

Four things happen quickly in sequence

**<sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.**

**<sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.**

A constant image in the Old Testament—whether in the wilderness as a pillar of fire or in the foundation of the world as the Spirit of the Lord like the wind.

Now, in this little house of disciples, wind and fire come together as God's presence arrives.

**<sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.**

God's presence is not restricted, as it says "All of them" – this means that everyone gathered all 120 whether men, women, or children were filled with the Spirit.

The Spirit of God does not discriminate and in this circumstance, he enables the speaking of languages as proof of his arrival.

Another worthwhile conversation is exploring tongues and scripture more but, in this context, it has a purpose.

**<sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.**

At Pentecost, **pilgrims from all over the world** witness God's power firsthand.

The world comes to Jerusalem—**God never misses an opportunity, even when we do.**

His Spirit moves, calling people to pay attention. The moment is set, the audience is ready, and **God chooses the unlikely—Peter.**

Peter, the very one who denied Jesus three times.

It's not about **status** but **willingness**—and Peter steps forward, delivering a powerful speech

In v.22

**<sup>22</sup> “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.**

If you want to summarize this entire speech, Peter preached Jesus.

He knew Jesus and he wanted to share Jesus, and he calls for a response

**<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

He wasn't asking the Jewish people to confess for the death of Jesus but the forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus is much bigger than our sin.

The External and Internal Aspects of Being a Christian

Our salvation comes **externally**—not from within ourselves, but through **Christ’s work** in His death and resurrection.

In response, the **Holy Spirit fills us internally**, assuring us that we are **known, saved, and belong to Christ**.

This is the foundation of the Church—**externally saved by Jesus, internally filled with the Spirit**

The next step for any believer who has placed their trust in Jesus is found in our verse, as Peter said: “Be baptized.”

Baptism is an act of **outward obedience that reflects an inward reality**—we declare to others that Jesus has saved us.

We are excited for our next baptism opportunity coming up on Easter weekend! You can sign up here.

For the early church of Acts as they called people to Jesus, they had a response of over 3000 people added

I have a baby at home, she’s a one-year-old and she is slowly learning and devoting herself to more. Mostly learning to walk and eat, but it’s both exciting and new.

That’s what it is like for this church, a baby church learning to grow.

**<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.**

They were bound together because they were first bound to Christ.

It was inconceivable for them to live in isolation—being a believer means sharing life with other believers in everything we do.

This connection was voluntary, an expression of the deep bond they shared.

And while the same sense of unity should exist in Christian community today, the way we practice it may look different.

They didn’t keep it to themselves v.47

**<sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

Repeatedly in the Book of Acts the church in Jerusalem continues to grow and hits a mass in which the governing and religious powers must start responding.

When established power is threatened, in this case the religious power in Jerusalem, the response is usually violent.

A shift happens in Acts 7 with the story of Stephen.

Stephen is sharing the good news of Jesus with a group of his fellow Israelites. He boldly shares with them.

**Acts 7:49-50**

**49 “Heaven is my throne,  
and the earth is my footstool.  
What kind of house will you build for me?  
says the Lord.  
Or where will my resting place be?  
50 Has not my hand made all these things?’**

Stephen boldly declares that **true worship is not confined to temples or buildings—**but happens in our hearts, where we worship God.

And because of Jesus, **we are no longer bound to the law of Moses—**we have been set free.

For the **young church**, this truth brings a major shift.

First, **Jewish believers** begin to realize that **faith in Jesus is bigger than Judaism.**

**Jesus is not just for Israel—He is for the whole world.**

Second, the **Jewish leaders respond with violence.**

Stephen is **stoned to death**, becoming **the first martyr of Christianity.**

His death **ignites a wave of persecution** against the early Jesus-followers.

But what was meant to **shut down the movement** only fuels it further.

**Persecution scatters the early Church—**forcing believers out of Jerusalem and into the surrounding regions of **Judea and Samaria.**

And in doing so, the Gospel spreads even farther.

Jesus promised the witness would go out from Jerusalem, but I don't think anyone expected it to be in the form of suffering.

Nobody wants to suffer but maybe God has a plan in our suffering, he did for the church.

All the stuff you are going through, may be the catalyst in which God is doing something great.

That's what he did with the early church, and the greatness was beyond preserving wealth or health but the growth of his mission to Judea and Samaria.

This leads us into Acts 9

A man named Saul, who truly hates the followers of Jesus is on his way to deliver more harm to the church.

**<sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"**

**<sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.**

**"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied**

This man, Saul later becomes known as the Apostle Paul as one of the founders of the early church.

*The God Story* expands on Saul like this

"Despite his resistance to the works of God, Saul is wanted by God. God's longing love would follow Saul to Damascus without his permission....only a revelation by the Spirit of the Lord could break Saul's fundamentalism. Saul had now 'heard the voice of a crucified God' and it wrecked him. He would never be the same again."

In Acts 10, Peter is going through a transformation—one that God initiates using a man named Cornelius, a Gentile.

A Gentile was someone completely outside the citizenship, heritage, and religious beliefs of the Israelite people.

Peter has a vision—a great sheet full of animals, and God tells him to eat.

But for Peter, this is a problem. In Israelite culture, there were strict dietary laws, and eating ceremonially unclean animals was a major **no-no**.

Yet God was showing Peter something much bigger: we should not call anyone clean or unclean based on race.

God led Peter to Cornelius, and in doing so, He declared Cornelius clean.

The old purity laws could no longer separate Jew from Gentile.

It's why in Acts 10:34

**<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.**

Peter's vision led him to a powerful realization: **God does not discriminate between people.**

Those who fear God and do what is right—placing their trust in Jesus in life and deed—are welcomed into His kingdom.

The division between Jew and Gentile is now gone, **washed away by the Spirit of God.**

And the results? **Immediate.** The church explodes in numbers, spreading farther and farther.

The Gospel, which began **locally** in Jerusalem, grew **regionally** into Judea and Samaria, and now, it is reaching **the rest of the world.**

Paul, Peter, and many others take up this mission, building **home churches** all over the known world. These communities form a **family of families**, a network of believers unlike anything seen before.

But these new churches would face **huge challenges**—complex issues like spiritual gifts, marriage, multiculturalism, generational diversity, sexual integrity, engaging with an unbelieving culture, government, and daily work.

This was a group of people **unlike any before**—brought together not by race, status, or nationality, but by **faith in the crucified Jesus, the Son of God.**

And Paul—he poured out his life for these churches. He embodied **the servant-hearted nature of Christ**, bearing suffering in his own body for the sake of the Gospel.

The rest of the New Testament consists of letters—written to **build up, equip, and guide** the early church as it faced complex new challenges.

And in many ways, **not much has changed.** The church today still navigates deep and difficult issues, just as they did then.

These letters make up the majority of the New Testament, showing us how the early church **continued, thrived, and spread**—ultimately reaching Rome.

Rome was known as **the center of the world** at that time. In fact, for those in Jerusalem, it was considered **the ends of the earth**.

Through it all, the church followed a simple yet powerful model: **prayer and responding to the Spirit**.

At its core, the church has always been this:

**A prayerful family on mission, surrendered to the Holy Spirit.**

And as the book of Acts comes to its final chapter, we see Paul—a man on mission. **Shipwrecked, abandoned, beaten, and imprisoned—yet unwavering.**

He lived his life fully surrendered to Christ.

**Acts 28:31**

**<sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!**

From the *God Story*

“After approximately 30 years and 10,000 miles of travelling Paul had journeyed through Israel, Syria, Asia Minor, Malta, Cyprus, Crete, Macedonia and Italy. But he was not done. Acts reveals the wind of the Spirit would finally blow him all the way to Rome”

The words of Jesus – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth – had come true.

The Gospel had reached the heart of the empire—but it didn’t stop there.

For the last 2,000 years, people from **all backgrounds and nations**—rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, male and female, master and slave—have been **formed into a family** through the fiery love of the Spirit.

And we will not stop now.

The Church is a **movement of the Spirit**, the presence of God among His people.

Every person who acknowledges Jesus as Lord and yields to Him **is part of that Church**.

And the Church has a mission

We are **here** because **the mission is here**.

And that mission **to make known the good news of Jesus to those who do not yet know Him**.



The early church **waited**—and the wait was worth it. Pentecost **changed everything**.

Now, **we** are that Spirit-filled family on mission—called to go **with boldness and without hindrance**.

So where is God calling you?

Is it **local**?

**Regional**?

Or maybe even **farther**?

If you're ready to take that step, talk to our **Outreach Team** or start serving with one of our **Cornerstone Teams**.

**Devotion to Christ brings devotion to one another.**

We are a **formed family** because we are **related by the blood of Christ**.

Connect with **Group Life Ministries, Youth Ministries, or Young Adults** and take your next step.

There's a false idea that **God's mission is only for professionals or missionaries**.

But the book of Acts **proves this wrong**. The mission is for **the entire community of God**—ordinary people responding to an extraordinary call.

So where is God calling **you** to go next?

You are **already called**.

Now, it's up to you **how you respond**.