**ACTS SERIES**

**CLASS 5**

**PURPOSE, PLANNING, PROCLAIMING**

**October 15, 2014**

Ron has done a great job of explaining how Luke tells two chapters of the same story by writing his own book, Luke, and then Acts. In Luke 1, he explains that his mission in writing the book was to “give an account” of all the things Jesus did and taught.

For what purpose? Was it to tell a good story that would one day be made into a movie? No! He explained to us what Jesus taught, and then, in Acts, he showed us, through the experiences of various men, how to spread those teachings, so that through them, we can “win as many as possible,” as Paul says in I Corinthians 9:19.

The life and acts and teachings of Jesus aren't just a nice story; they serve a purpose, to tell us how to live and how to be saved and have eternal life!! So, we're given these teachings, now if we really care about people and want them to join us, we must disseminate them and teach others.

And no one person can do this. Each one of us has our own specific story, background, and talents that we can use to spread the message. Let's take our elders, for example: Robert was a football player for UGA. He now spends his days meeting with sports people. He speaks their language and knows what they're talking about. I can't do that!! Jim is not only a math teacher, but he knows how to build things. He can work side by side with someone, build a deck, and share with them that way. I couldn't do that! No Sonny can relate to pretty much anyone, but because of where he's from and how he's raised, he has special appeal for, you know, simple country folk!

Yet, I ask you. Which of these brothers could share with a Star Trek nerd? None. That's what I'm here for. Or which of them is Jewish? It's always been my prayer to study with a Jew.

We have a purpose. What is it? Who can name the single scripture that best describes it? Mat 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Also, 2 Corinthians 5:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

We're ambassadors, announcing the greatest message ever. God is using us to make an appeal to those who haven't found him yet. In Acts, we learn how different men of different backgrounds fulfilled this purpose in different ways, to bring the gospel to different kinds of people.

Back in the day, we used to challenge each other to share our faith with a certain number of people each day. That was great for building our nerve, but I don't think it was particularly efficient or effective. I mean, if you have a purpose or a project to complete, do you go about it haphazardly? No! It takes thought and planning. If you're trying to sell snow cones, do you send salesmen to the tundra of Alaska? If you're opening up a snowmobile dealership, do you say to yourself, “Hey, I think there's a completely untapped market in West Palm Beach”? No! You identify your field, develop a method, and prepare to adjust as you go.

We're going to look at how some guys accomplished this, starting with the guy who could actually be called the first evangelist, John the Baptist. Now here's a guy who knew and understood his mission. What do we know about him?

* Jesus' cousin.
* Born in the hill country of Judea (rural).
* Luke 7:28, was later known as “the greatest man who ever lived.”

Read Luke 3:1-6.

* What was his message? (Repent for the forgiveness of sins)
* Where was his mission field? The “hill country” implies northern Galilee. Rural, only Hebrew and Aramaic spoken. Very “old school.” However, the southern part of Galilee had more Roman and Greek influence, and was much more progressive. Actually of a political hotbed, and the center of Jewish life in the area. John could preach in the country in the north and still attract progressives from the south.

Read Luke 3:7-20.

* What was his preaching style? Direct, dramatic; to appeal to a simple people who needed direction. This was something the local rural populace would understand...fiery and direct, like the OT prophets.
* Who did he influence? Jews, soldiers (Gentiles), and even tax collectors. However, he wasn't afraid to take on the political status quo.

John had a purpose. He understood the area and the people around him and adapted his methods accordingly. However, when you're sharing the gospel with someone, does it always have to be fire and brimstone? Let's look at another guy, Paul:

What do we know about him? Philippians 3:4-6:

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

As we know from Acts, he violently persecuted the early Christians. Then, in one of my favorite stories in the Bible (Acts 9), he gets converted and is given new marching orders by the Spirit. So what happens?

Read Acts 9:19-31. Immediately after his conversion, Paul starts to preach using the same bold, fiery style that John used. What impact did he have on his own people? He baffled them. They tried to kill him. The apostles were afraid of him. Even the Hellensitic Jews who, by definition, were more liberal and open to other ideas, tried to wipe him out.

Now, what if this happened to you? Here you are, a new Christian, excited about the message of the gospel, so you try to share that message with those closest to you: Your own friends, family, or people in the community...and they try to kill you. What would be your inclination? Get discouraged and quit.

This happens again and again to Paul. He ends up getting jailed and beaten. Then, in Acts 17, he ends up in Athens (Greece, not Georgia). Read Acts 17:16-34. Athens is different! It's an intellectual place! People stand around doing nothing but talking about the latest ideas! Sound like any place you know? They probably had a football team.

As usual, the Jews are sneering at him. But who develops an interest in his message? Members of the Areopagus (which, ironically, the Romans referred to as “Mars Hill”).

At that time the Areopagus was a judicial body of aristocrats, something like a high court of appeals.

All of a sudden, Paul has a new and much more receptive audience. He finds that he has a certain appeal to intellectual gentiles. In fact, he eventually becomes “the apostle to the gentiles” (Gal 2:6-9). Turns out, this had been god's plan all along (read Acts 9:15).

So, he adapts his preaching style. Look at Acts 26:1-27. Instead of fire and brimstone, he's disarmingly deferential. He wins people over. How does he share his faith? He just tells his story.

We should all keep that in mind. If ever you don't know what to say, or you feel intimidated...just start out by telling your story. As a psychologist, I can tell you that people find the lives of other people to be interesting.

The point is, Paul adapted. Read 1 Cor 9:19-23. He remained receptive to the Holy Spirit, and he adapted. He ended up proclaiming his faith to soldiers, jailers, and politicians, none of whom were part of his intended audience at first.

You don't need to have Paul's brains. He was an educated man, but there are plenty of guys in Acts who weren't, and they became just as effective:

Peter, for example. What kind of guy was he?

* Jew.
* Blue-collar workin' guy.

What was his sphere of influence? A close-knit Jewish community in Bethsaida, where he was born. A small fishing village.

Galatians 2:7-8 says that just as Paul became the preacher to the Gentiles, Peter was the preacher to his own people. So, where did he start his ministry? Acts 2. With the help of the Holy Spirit, he starts sharing right there, right then, at the temple in Jerusalem, where as many of his people as possible were gathered for the Pentecost.

By Acts 4, Peter and John were imprisoned for sharing the message. By Acts 5, he gets flogged for it. However, by Acts 6, even some of the priests are converted. By Acts 8, the new church is scattered (mostly by Paul). In Acts 10, Peter has a vision and ends up sharing with Cornelius, a Roman centurion. This is his proof that the gospel isn't for Jews only, but for everyone!

So, from then on out, he and Paul work more or less as a team, delivering the same message, but to two different kinds of people, according to their gifts and backgrounds and preaching styles and spheres of influence.

So: Here's the moral of the story. When you became a Christian, you became an ambassador and proclaimer of the good news. You have to share that news, not just hoard it. In fact, if you feel great about it, you should feel compelled to share it!

How? I don't know! But notice what these guys all did: They started sharing the gospel immediately, from right where they were at the time. Where are you right now? What is your sphere of influence? Use what you have to make friends and win people over as Paul did...because, the message is more powerful when it comes from a friend.