

**EKKLESIA 1-A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS**  
**ACTS 1:1-11**  
**AUGUST 12, 2018**

In 2000, Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book called *The Tipping Point*. This book quickly became a bestseller. The point of this book is simple. What causes movements to happen? What causes some movements to flare up and spread like wildfires while others peter out? Essentially Gladwell is begging the question, how did this happen? Gladwell likens the spread of movements to the study of epidemiology. He was picking up on something that we now commonly refer to in the internet/digital age as “going viral.” When a video on YouTube gets viewed and sent to a group of friends, and that group sends it to all of their friends, and they send it to all of their friends, overnight a video can have millions of views. This is the idea of going viral and Gladwell posits that most movements depend on an epidemic nature. Gladwell explains this theory and tackles some real-life movements and traces how they reached their tipping point. Many of these stories you read about, and in retrospect, it makes sense that they grew and spread across a region, country or even the planet. It was appealing, with plenty of followers, great marketing, good luck and a dynamic leader who ran the show.

I want to tell you about one of the most unlikely movements in the history of our planet and no one saw it coming. The message wasn’t appealing. It had very few followers. It had no marketing, terrible luck and the leader had seemingly vanished. In the fourth decade of the first century, a man named Jesus was executed by the Roman government as an enemy of the state. His message was to forsake the pursuits of this world, to die to yourself and to live life not for yourself but for God and for others. His followers believed he rose again and walked among them for 40 days. Over the course of his ministry, he had 12 followers. One of them betrayed him. After rising from the dead and walking among the people for 40 days, there were about 120 followers. This group was not widely respected or widely known. It had no prominent leaders or people of influence among its numbers. This group had terrible luck in that it was prosecuted and persecuted, thrown in jail, beaten, shipwrecked, attacked by outward

oppression and inward strife and occasionally executed. On top of all of this, Jesus had ascended to heaven and left this rag-tag group with the most outrageous mission ever. Make disciples of all nations.

All of this story also unfolds in the midst of the most powerful and pagan nation in human history up until this point, Rome. The Roman Empire had a massive army, tons of money, education and political power. Historians estimate the Roman Empire was somewhere around 60 million people at this point, which would mean that 1 in every 5 million people were followers of Jesus. If you fast forward three centuries later, it is estimated that Rome was 250 million people and there were 25 million Christians including the Emperor, Constantine. They went from 1 in 5 million to 1 in 10 in three centuries. They multiplied by 208,000% in three centuries. How did this happen? How did this movement happen? How did this group of rag-tags with a message of dying to yourself from an executed carpenter with no money, no power and no clout become a movement that changed the Roman Empire? If you really follow that question, how did it become a movement that includes over a billion people today and several billions of people throughout its 2,000-year history?

In the grand scheme of things, you would never have thought that a church of 120 people with no power, no money and no clout could stand up to Rome with its massive army, political clout and huge sums of cash. Yet today we name our pets Caesar and Nero and our children Peter, James and John. How did this happen?

We are starting my final series at SFC, and I thought what better topic than Jesus and his church. Not my church, not your church, not Arvin or Sally's church. Jesus and his church, and how it grows and thrives. We will be going through the book of Acts for several weeks, and we will watch Jesus build his church. Against all odds, this movement will grow. In all reality, the book of Acts is a catalogue of every barrier the church faced and subsequently busted through that barrier towards more growth, more influence and more life changes. There will be physical barriers from external persecution as the church is imprisoned, beaten and even killed. There

will be internal barriers as issues of sin and theology force the church to wrestle with their beliefs. The church will bust through geographical barriers as it leaves Jerusalem and steadily moves to the city of Rome by the end. The church will bust through religious barriers as this Jewish community quickly begins to include the Gentiles. Chapter after chapter illustrates barrier after barrier, and by the power of God, the movement keeps going full steam ahead.

This series will be important for us as a church because it will force us to consider where you are going as a church. My hope is that with these parting words, I can encourage you and remind you of God's great plan for his people. At the heart of this book, I want to follow the theme of Ekklesia. A Greek word that we now translate as "church" but literally means called-out ones. Called-out of the rat race of Silicon Valley. Called-out of comfort. Called-out of ourselves for the sake of others. Being called-out is integral to being church, ekklesia, and big part of being called-out is displacement. As I have told you before, God often uses displacement to shape and mold us. He displaces Abraham from Ur to Canaan. He displaces the Israelites from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt to the desert, from Israel to Babylon. God uses displacement to shape and mold us. He breaks down our routines and rattles our comfort to grow the church and move us to be the called-out ones. Each week I want to show you how Jesus will build his church. Hopefully I can show you a bit of displacement and how God might shake us up to see the world in a new way.

The book of Acts was written by Dr. Luke, the same man who wrote the Gospel of Luke. Most people believe this was written in the middle to late 60's AD. Luke was not one of the 12 disciples, but he was a close associate of Paul who investigated the stories of Jesus thoroughly and experienced some of the events of Acts first hand. Luke was a Gentile who wrote his gospel and history for a Gentile audience. What he does is show us the story of how 120 people began the process of turning into 25 million. How an executed carpenter conquered the Roman Empire. How love won and God brought people back to himself. How did it all go down? What was the tipping point for this new movement?

## *Acts 1:1-11*

*The ekklesia is focused upon life for others.*

In verses 1-5, Luke introduces a theme that will run throughout this book. The Holy Spirit is the engine of mission and discipleship. Some people have noted that the title of this book can be misleading. Acts lends itself for the reader to think it is about the Acts of the Apostles or the acts of the early church, but this book really is about the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the early church. When you realize that the early church was not a collection of super hero Christians but rather run of the mill ordinary people following an extraordinary God, you are reminded that the hero of every Bible story is God. The people in Acts argue over who gets fed first and over Gentiles versus Jews. They chicken out on mission trips. They succumb to peer pressure and blackball fellow believers because of their ethnicity. They seek glory for their monetary contributions they gave to the church. Time and again, the fallibility and frailty of humanity is displayed in this book, yet the church is unstoppable. It is not because this is a group of stellar, holy, A-quality disciples that succeeded because of their own skill and piety. This whole book is the story of a stellar, holy God who advances his church and builds his kingdom despite the fallibility of his people.

I was thinking back to when my son, Bennett, was about a year old and how much we learned about having a boy after only having a girl. Boys are different from girls. Earth-shattering, I know. While our daughter can be content to play with toys, Bennett loves to throw, smash and topple things. His sole goal was often the destruction of what was before him. Sometimes I will play blocks with him, and it takes a great deal of my effort as the father to keep the thing going. In his little personality, there is a desire to knock down. Almost like he can't help himself. Nonetheless, we work together and build towers and inevitably we show it to my wife and say, "Look at the tower we built." In all actuality, his help was minimal. I had to actively intervene to keep him from toppling it, but as father and son, we built the tower. This is a small picture of our heavenly father building the church with his fallible children. Despite our own inclinations

to blow it up, break it and divide it, our God continues to build, and he allows us the privilege of being involved in the process. These first few verses introduce us to the engine for the church, and the next few verses introduce us to the mission for the church.

### *Acts 1:6-11*

The disciples still haven't really grasped the Kingdom of God idea. In verse 3, we see that Jesus spoke to them for 40 days about the Kingdom of God, not the Kingdom of Israel but the Kingdom of God. The all-inclusive Kingdom of God for those who will believe. The Kingdom that is inhabited by those who have put their faith in God and who are committed to the Kingdom of Earth looking more and more like the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus healed people, fed people, included people, loved people and served people. If he is our king, then we can assume that those are some aspects of what his kingdom should look like. After three years of ministry and 40 days of preaching after his death, the disciples are still looking for a tangible physical Kingdom of Israel. They are looking for economic, physical, political and military might. They still viewed Jesus as a conquering king that would restore them to preeminence and power.

Jesus steers them in a whole new direction. Take my message to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the world. This is actually an outline for the book of Acts. Chapters 1-8 are Jerusalem. Chapters 9-11 are Judea and Samaria. Chapter 11 to the end are about the gospel's march to Rome. Not only is this an outline for the book, but it was also a progressive nightmare for a Jewish audience. First, go with this message to Jerusalem to a people who are like you but don't like your message. Then go to Samaria, to a people who are partially like you but don't like your message. Finally go to the ends of the earth, to a people who are not like you and do not like your message. The gospel going to Jerusalem made some sense because these were Jewish people who had expectations for a messiah. You only had to convince them that Jesus was the one they were waiting for. Samaria made less sense because the Samaritans were only half-Jewish and they had a skewed theology that would make this process even harder. Worst of all were the Romans. They had no context for the messiah in their pantheon of gods and

idols. They were unclean and unholy. The message of a crucified savior would be utterly foolish to them.

We often hear this commissioning and miss the lunacy and impossibility of it. Not only the physical journey involved for the gospel to travel to Rome and beyond, but the fact that the further they moved away from Jerusalem, the less and less likely people would be open to the message of Jesus. There is great irony in the mission these men asked about and the one they received. When they asked about the Kingdom of Israel being restored, they were concerned with their own social status. Their own bank accounts. Their own well-being. If Israel was restored in the way they were seeking, their country would thrive, prosperity would be everywhere and their political clout would grow. Which would mean they would become richer, more comfortable and more powerful. In contrast to that, Jesus is going to send them on a mission that will require them to die to themselves. He was displacing them, he was calling them to be ekklesia, called-out ones. They were imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked and even killed for their faith, and it was all so others would know Jesus. In fact, not only was Israel not going to be restored to some past version of power, but they were actually decimated in 70 AD. Just a few short decades after Jesus left and in the lifetime of most disciples, the Romans quashed an uprising killing thousands of Jews and completely destroying the temple.

Jesus is introducing a new paradigm; my kingdom is not about this world. I don't think how you think. My kingdom is not built upon your comfort and your blessing but on you being my witnesses and blessing everyone you meet. The called-out church is focused upon life for others. This means the more inward-focused we are, the less effective we will be. The more focused we are on our preferences, the less effective we will be. The more obsessed we are with what we get out of this community compared to what we give to this community, the less effective we will be.

One of my favorite quotes is from a man named Nelson Henderson, "the true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit." This is kind of a synopsis of Life for

Others. We should use our time, energies and resources to bless those around us. This is the essence of Life for Others. Life for Others is one of the three life goals we pursue at this church. We are focused upon serving people outside of ourselves for a few reasons. 1) The leader of our movement did it, so we feel called to follow suit. 2) The Bible says when we love other people, we are actually loving God vicariously. 3) The more you do things for others, the more you are killing the “me” obsessed portion of your soul.

One of my favorite preachers recently shared the rules for being a toddler. I want to share them with you.

Property Laws of a Toddler:

1. If I like it, it's mine. 2. If it's in my hand, it's mine. 3. If I can take it from you, it's mine. 4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine. 5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way. 6. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine. 7. If it looks just like mine, it's mine. 8. If I saw it first it's mine. 9. If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine. 10. If it's broken, it's yours!

To stand out, SFC will need to be a church the rebels against a “mine” culture of our day and the “mine” culture of some churches. To do that, you will have to remain focused upon Life for Others. That means, keep serving. Keep building houses in Mexico. Keep loving your neighbor. Keep being generous. Keep caring for the sick and keep visiting the homebound. Keep caring for orphans. Keep loving the homeless. Keep praying for your enemies. That's what called-out people do.

This might be one of the biggest ways God is changing lives in the United States in the present day. When selfless people stand up to a selfish culture by giving their time, energies and money for a cause that does not benefit themselves, people are taking notice. Our culture is used to churches who hold events that are self-beneficial. They are used to churches who take positions

that are comfortable and build buildings that make their lives easier. They aren't used to busy Silicon Valley people taking time off of work and school for the sake of poor people in a foreign country they have not met. The ekklesia, the called-out church, is focused on life for others. Jesus planted the tree of the cross so we might sit in its shade. If it was all about him, he would have chosen his own comfort, his own safety, his own plans. Instead he said, "Not my will but thine be done."