

Church Planting in Jerusalem

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[0 : 0 0] we see following the Great Commission that God's disciples, those followers of Jesus Christ, as they began to move about Jerusalem and then go out through Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth, practicing their witness and the proclamation of the gospel and evangelism and discipleship, that it leads to the fruit and result of church planting. But first, let me begin with a quiz. That's just one question on this quiz. And the question is this, what is the fifth book of the New Testament? Or what is the name of the book in the New Testament that follows the first four books of Matthew, Luke, Mark, John? What's the name of that book?

If you said Acts or the book of Acts, then you would be wrong. Perhaps you have a Bible in front of you because you won't discover this on a smart device. Don't look in the table of contents because it likely will say Acts as well. But if you open and turn to Acts with me now, you'll see that it says the Acts of the Apostles. Traditionally, the book of Acts was called the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Now, titles of books are important because the title gives some indication of the plot or content or direction of the book itself. I have recently begun watching the BBC series on called the Terra. Now, initially, you would think the Terra stands for a book or a program that is going to be a horror program. But as you look into the program itself, you find the Terra is the name of the historic Her Majesty ship that was sent from England in 1850s to the Arctic seas to discover the Northwest Passage. And it's about them being trapped in the ice and the adventures that they have and the difficulties that they have. So the name can be a little bit misleading or it can set the direction.

So the title is important. John Stott and his great commentary on the book of Acts suggested this as the title. The continuing words and deeds of Jesus by his Holy Spirit through his apostles.

That's quite a comprehensive title, but it's very, very accurate. Did you catch that what John Stott includes in his title that describes the entire book of Acts is that it is the working of the Holy Spirit through the followers of Jesus directed by the continuing ministry of Jesus from heaven through his Spirit?

[3 : 3 1] You see, we have here recorded in Acts 1 verses 1 through 14, the ascension of Jesus. But the founder and captain of our faith, he who has won our salvation by his death in our place and the forgiveness of our sin, he who has now sent the Holy Spirit is with us through the Spirit's presence.

He's not retired to heaven, but from the throne of God, he still directs the continuing growth, I dare say birth of his church and the progress of Christendom until the very end of the age.

A.T. Pearson was a famous minister, a contemporary of George Mueller, D.L. Moody, Charles Spurgeon.

In fact, he would assume the pulpit of Charles Spurgeon when he passed away and died. But he's famous for launching a worldwide mission movement, appealing to the next generation of young men and young women to go abroad and to make disciples and to continue the work that was recorded in Acts, as if you were going to add chapters to the continuing work of Acts.

Let me read to you a quote. Church of Christ, the records of these Acts of the Holy Spirit have never reached completeness.

[5 : 21] This is one book which has no proper close because it waits for new chapters to be added so fast and so far as the people of God shall reinstate the Blessed Spirit in his holy seat of control over our Acts.

Acts 29 is the name of the world's largest church planting movement. If you're a Bible student, you'll know that there is no 29th chapter of the book of Acts.

Were they wrong? Do they not know their Bible? No. What they were communicating, even by the name of Acts 29, is that the mission of evangelism, discipleship, and the fruit from that of church planting never stops.

The work of ministry and establishing, planting, and growing the church that we see in Acts is ours to continue as if we were going to add chapters.

The focus verse that I want to have you look at this morning in the time that remains is verse 8. In fact, it's a great memory verse.

[6 : 52] It's a verse that is very short, but we need to apply this verse not only to the apostles, but to all disciples, even ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

This is Jesus articulating in the 40 days following his resurrection and prior to his ascension, the Great Commission.

The Great Commission, as you know, in Matthew 28, is Jesus saying, I now have all authority based on my power over life and death and proving myself by the resurrection to be the Lord, your God.

By that authority, he commissions us to go out and make disciples, to go and to make disciples among all of the nations.

[8 : 12] Here in verse 8 of Acts 1 is the strategy that we will be his witnesses to the nations beginning in Jerusalem and then Judea and Samaria and then to the very ends of the earth until he returns.

And so an outline, this is a good way to understand the entire book of Acts. An outline could be chapters 1 through 8 are seeing the church begin to get the vision for church planting, the establishing of new congregations in Jerusalem.

Chapter 8 of Acts, which we're going to look at next week, shows the church going out into Judea and Samaria away from Jerusalem and planting or starting a new congregation, their first church plant.

And then our third talk, in the third week, we're going to look at Paul and his missionary journeys out of Acts 16, where we see that this mission, this co-mission to plant churches, new congregations following evangelism and discipleship, that he reaches out as far as possible, even the ends of the earth, Rome, Asia, even perhaps Spain.

I want to give you three support, three support ideas to the big idea. The big idea to be restated is this, the pattern, the pattern of church planting is seen throughout the New Testament.

[10 : 08] The pattern of church planting is seen in evangelism going out and resulting in new congregations formed around gathered, worshiping disciples.

I want you to see three things in the time that remains. First of all, the commission of our vision at Glasgow City Free Church to be a church planting church, that it's a part of our DNA, never to leave us.

The commission beneath our vision, what is our foundation? Secondly, the competing vision against our vision at Glasgow City Free Church to be a church planting church.

There are other thoughts and opinions. There are competing visions or designs and plans rather than be a church planting church. And then lastly, we'll conclude by looking at what are we doing now?

How do we begin? What are the next steps? The commencement, the commencement or the launching forth of our vision at Glasgow City Free Church to be a church planting church.

[11 : 33] Now, look again at Acts 1-8. These are the words of Jesus and as I expressed earlier, this is a re-articulation of the Great Commission.

Acts is written by Luke. This is his second book. We could say the Gospel of Luke is a record of the birth, life, ministry, mission, resurrection, up to the ascension of Jesus Christ.

Acts is part two. It's a continuation of Jesus' ministry, but now, not physically on earth, but spiritually from heaven following his ascension.

Luke, in his Gospel, articulates the Great Commission, the commission, our mission that we're on as followers of Christ this way.

Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things and behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

[13 : 02] The Apostle Paul in Romans 15, he connects, it's very important that you see this, he connects the Great Commission for us as followers of Christ to proclaim the Gospel, to be witnesses, evangelism, share our faith, and to make disciples fully formed and growing in the knowledge of God and the Gospel of Christ.

He connects that with church planting or the mission of starting new congregations. Romans 15, verse 19 and 20, by the power of the Spirit of God so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Iliarachum, I have fulfilled the ministry of the Gospel of Christ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the Gospel not where Christ has already been named lest I build on someone else's foundation.

Peter Wagner, the founder of the Church Growth Movement in America said that to date there has not been found a greater strategy for evangelism than to start new congregations.

Tim Keller says that when we observe the Apostle Paul in the Scriptures particularly in Acts that he would come into a community and disciples would be one and formed but when he left a new congregation would have begun.

John Piper with his heart for mission says missions exist because worship does not.

[15 : 03] The goal of missions is to go to that area that does not have a worshiping church or there's a want for an evangelical presence.

Missions propelled we're propelled into missions in order to establish new worshiping communities.

Here's my definition for a church plan. an adventure of faith to follow the Holy Spirit into new places to start new congregations in obedience to Jesus Christ's great commission.

That's the commission of our vision at Glasgow City Free Church that we seek to follow. That we connect ourselves in obedience to the great commission desiring to start not one but to be a part in some way great or small of forming new congregations that we would see the very commission of Jesus Christ putting us on mission of starting new congregations.

do you see that? Do you see the connection between the great commission and the commission of Acts 1-8?

[16 : 39] Do you see it? Do you support it? Do you agree? Were you joining me in trusting Jesus Christ and obeying him and following him on mission in the mission of being a church planting congregation?

Secondly, there is competition to this vision of being a people on mission to evangelize disciple others resulting in new congregations.

There's competition. If you look at verse 6 here in Acts 1, we find the disciples asking the Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

Their slip is showing. They're showing their agenda. They're showing their vision. Their vision of what their mission or the ministry should look like.

And it's against, it's contrary to the vision that Jesus has. Notice that they want Jesus to restore the theocracy of Israel.

[17 : 58] It's as if, I've seen this in America, particularly of late, the desire of many Christians for the Lord himself to restore us to being a Christian nation by political power.

They're saying, Lord, Lord, we've got a vision. We want you to bless that. We want you to do this.

We want you to restore Israel. But Jesus has a different vision. Note the gravitational pull. We should confess the gravitational pull is the same with us.

The gravitation is to take care of ourselves. the gravitational pull is for the Lord to do these things rather than us rolling up our sleeves and getting involved.

In a church, in a greater level at the church, it looks like a church that's more focused on itself becoming ingrown, and that's a competing vision to Jesus' vision, which basically is the buzz, light year vision.

[19 : 16] He has no gravity, and he's saying rather than yield to the gravitational pull to take care of yourself, go to infinity and beyond.

Be propelled to go rather than simply follow your vision that competes against mine. Let me give you very quickly four common mindsets that can be considered as four competing visions against this vision of Jesus to go out.

Number one, let God do it. God is sovereign, and to this we agree. Let God do it. That's the very thing that the disciples are asking.

J.I. Packer wrote a great and wonderful book on evangelism called Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, and he makes the case very clear that we can't hide behind God's sovereignty to avoid evangelism and to avoid our witness to our neighbor.

indeed, the sovereignty of God gives us no excuse to not evangelize others. The sovereignty of God is a great comfort and support as it propels us with confidence.

[20 : 49] The other one, another one, number two, is let others do it. You know, we want to be the look up to the stars and remember Jesus fondly, church.

We want to be, as it says in verse 10, they were gazing into heaven as he went. We want to gaze up into heavens and we want to dig deep into great theological mysteries.

We want to be the worshiping church. That's our mission and that's all our mission is. We want to be the church that disciples, our people, but that's all that we do.

Let others do it. Number three, let us do it later. We agree that the mission of the church is evangelism, discipleship, that results in new congregations.

We agree, but, you know, we've got a lot to maintain around here. Our roof is leaking. Our carpets need to be replaced. We need to fill in the blank, and then we will do it.

- [22 : 03] Sadly, someday never comes. Number three, we cannot do it. We're too small.
- We're not strategic enough in our thinking. We don't have the financial resources. We don't have a building. We kind join that pleading voice of Moses when he was invited to join God on mission.
- I don't speak very well. Or maybe the twelve spies in the land of Canaan who came back and said, we're just like grasshoppers. The task and the mission is too great and we're too small.
- Maybe we're like Gideon in Judges 6 and saying, I'm the least of the least tribe of the smallest tribe of Israel.
- I can't do it. And besides, when God, you don't go out with the armies anymore and I don't have the strength to lead the army. We find in Judges 6, God's reply is, I don't go out on mission with my people anymore because they refuse to join me in mission.
- [23 : 20] Join me in the mission and then you'll find my power available for you to do this mission. Harry Houdini was a famous escape artist and he was also famous for advertising his show in a town in the day of with his entourage walking down the street to the local prison or jail.
- And there he would boast to the jailer, lock me in to any stronghold and I will escape. Once the jailer led him to the cell.
- He turned his key in the lock in a unique way and then he left. Harry Houdini produced a pick and he began to pick and he turned the tumblers the opposite direction expecting the wall, the gate to fling open, but it remained shut.
- He reversed it and he tried it again. Feeling like he had completed, he tried again, but the gate remained shut to him. He was a prisoner.
- Hour after hour until he was exhausted, mess, and he finally, having reset the tumblers once back again to the beginning, he fell upon the gate, the door in desperation and it opened.
- [24 : 51] You see, the jailer had not locked the cell door. He could have left at any time, but his mindset was, this is a door, it's a barrier, and I can't get out except on my own resources and my resources are failing me.
- There's a great promise that we church planters and church planting churches take this as the gospel that propels us with courage and even joy in church planting.
- And the promise is found in Matthew 16 verse 18. Matthew 16 verse 18. It's Peter, it's Jesus looking at Peter, and he says, on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell, the doors of the prison of hell, the gates that would hold us back, shall not prevail against it.
- I will give you the keys, the keys of the kingdom. You see, we can have these mindsets, these competing visions, and they can hold us back from the very mission that we are called to.
- But God gives us the gospel. God gives us a great promise that he is with us, that he's provided with us the very presence of the Holy Spirit, and that the gates of hell are nothing to the advancing church.
- [26 : 33] church. I want to capitalize and expand the illustration of our pastor. Our pastor speaks of, we need a fishing boat.
- We do. We need a fishing boat that we can locate ourselves as a worshipping community in downtown Glasgow.

But what's the purpose of a fishing boat? What's the mission of a fishing boat? It's to catch fish. To see a fishing boat and all of its finery, well-stocked gear, getting the green slime and the seaweed and the barnacles growing on its hull because it's never left the dock for deep waters is quite a sad thing.

To never start the motor up with the very power that it needs is to never want for that power because we're quite happy simply staying on the fishing boat.

Fishing boats are made to catch fish and we need to leave the dock and go out where the fish are. My question to you is, do you have any competing visions?

[27 : 59] What are your questions? What are your concerns if we're to become a church planting church? What are the, what does it mean that we would have to give up as a very strong vision, our agenda, our plan?

Are we willing to surrender that for it to come under the greater vision of being a church planting church? And then finally, where do we start?

I agree. I see the great commission, evangelism, discipleship, resulting in new congregations. It's the mission. And I want to join this vision.

I want to begin. I want to be a people, a part of a church, a Vasco City Free Church. Let's commence. Here, we see a number of things.

First of all, we see the strategy. He says, begin right where you are. Begin in Jerusalem. Begin in your neighborhood among familiars.

[29 : 14] He's telling us that even now we have started if holding on to this vision and this strategy, we begin to bloom where we're planted.

We begin, look at the congregation in Jerusalem, newly formed in Acts 2, verses 44 through 47. I'm not going to read all of these verses, but just select a few.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. They were together. Day by day, attending the temple, together and breaking bread in their homes.

They were worshiping together. They were in one another's home together. These are new believers and Jews who had come to receive Christ as their Savior, Lord.

Having faith, praising God and having favor with all the people. And this is in addition to their worship. They were like a people in love with God.

[30 : 24] And they radiated that and their neighbors noticed. And the Lord added to their number. That number, if you look back at the beginning of Acts 2, is approximately 120 at this point.

And the Lord is adding to that number. It's way too many to meet in one individual home. So, dotted throughout Jerusalem, we see what might be considered small groups, but they're meeting for the purpose of fellowship and worship.

This is where new churches, new mini congregations, are beginning to bubble up, even in Jerusalem. They have designated spiritual leaders over each of these homes.

Many times, we'll see at the end of Paul's letter, he will send a greeting to a spiritual leader or an elder of the church that meets in an individual's home. Day by day, those who are being saved, the Lord is adding new people, new congregations are bubbling up, even in Jerusalem, their own backyard.

Now, let's identify our Jerusalem, and I think I have. It's right where we are now, but it's not to restrict us from what we're going to look at next week is new places with new congregations.

[31 : 53] So we're not avoiding the work here, we're giving our full-hearted attention to it, and that's why we want to locate in Glasgow City that we might be a worshipping community, radiating out, even seeing the winning of new converts, but we want them to join us in this vision as well.

Four current practices, four current practices that I observe here in Acts as I end. number one, wait.

Jesus instructs them while they're in Jerusalem and they're beginning this evangelism, a discipleship that results in church planting. He says, wait, and wait with expectation.

The Father's promise, the Holy Spirit is coming. Wait, wait, be patient. So, there's the thought here that we are waiting for the Spirit's power, but are we waiting with a sense of expectation, even confidence, that the Lord is willing to lead us and direct us and resource us if we will join him on mission with this vision.

Number two, while we're waiting, go. We're waiting for the direction of the Holy Spirit and we're expecting it to come. But while we are waiting, we're not inactive.

[33 : 32] We're not simply on a hill looking up. We are those that are out and about in our Jerusalem. We are ministering to our neighbor, praying for our neighbors, learning our neighbor by name, even confessing those times that we've been indifferent to our neighbor.

Number three, we see that in verse 14, they prayed with one accord. The word for accord can also mean direction. Do you, like me, think that that one direction in their prayers, that their prayers were influenced by their vision, their expectations of the Holy Spirit to come, even this commission to be witnesses in Jerusalem.

Think about how that would impact, and it does, even now at Glasgow City Free Church, our prayers, that we would always include in our prayers the request for more of the Holy Spirit's direction and lead and provision and resource.

back toward the vision of evangelism, discipleship, resulting in church planting. And then finally, worship.

We see here that they were a people that were a worshipping community, and that the Lord blessed that they could grow, but that not to be the largest church in the region of Glasgow, but that for them to be a strong, healthy church on mission that would be reproducing the ministry as a worshipping community.

[35 : 23] I thank you so much for the opportunity to talk this morning to you about what church planting looks like in its early stages of beginning in the life of a congregation and that in Jerusalem.

I pray that you will join me in the weeks ahead as we continue to pray and seek to align ourselves and our church with the vision and the mission of church planting.

Amen.