

# Teaching Acts – 1 of 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] You should all have an outline, Acts, the Cinderella of the New Testament, and that is on a gold sheet, and there is a green sheet as well to go with that.

Those are around. There's some down the front here. What I plan to do in the three, one-and-a-half-hour sessions we have is today we'll have introduction, as you have it outlined there, and then tomorrow and the next day we'll start working through the preaching portions of the book, and I'll try to explain what I would do with each portion, big idea, point of contact, et cetera, ways of applying each section, and then hopefully we might get time tomorrow to actually prepare one of the sermons, and I thought that on Thursday morning we could start the session with me preaching that sermon.

That might be helpful to us. My own history with Acts is that in the ten years of parish ministry I had, I did not preach on Acts, and I started to lecture in Acts when I came to the college back in 1986, and no-one else was lecturing in Acts, and it was either my job to do it or to find someone who should, and so I started to lecture in Acts with the great help of F.F. Bruce, and I've been lecturing in Acts for the past 22 years, until last year when we appointed a man who had a PhD in Acts from Trinity in the States, so I've stopped lecturing in it, given it away to him.

Someone said that Acts is like the Cinderella of the New Testament. It sits in the canon between the giants of John and Romans, and it really is something of a staging point between gospel and epistle, and yet it is a seedbed of schism.

On one occasion the phone rang. It was Philip Jensen. He was asking if I would join Philip and John Woodhouse. We were about to have a visit to the city of Sydney by an American evangelist by the name of John Wimber.

[ 2 : 13 ] Remember him as the signs and wonders evangelist. And Philip's idea is that the three of us should visit John Wimber in his hotel and ask him to leave our city before he did any damage in one of his crusades.

So he agreed to meet with us. We went to the hotel, and the conference room was on the basement level, and on the way down Philip said, oh, the last time a delegation like this visited John Wimber, when he shook their hands, they all hit the floor.

And I said, well, I hope we've all had our quiet time today. And when we got to the conference room, there was just John Wimber sitting there all by himself. And he's a very lovely brother, a lovely large man, and he welcomed us.

We shook his hand, and none of us hit the floor. And we sat down next to him. And then he was joined by his theological advisor, a man who had much more of an edge to him. And this man said to us that our problem in Sydney is that we are trying to build the church on the basis of an epistle-led recovery.

But that what John Wimber is on about is leading the church in an Acts-led recovery. Now, I'm going to come back to that later tomorrow and talk more about that.

[ 3 : 26 ] But to me, that highlighted the problem that we often have with Acts. We don't preach on it because we don't know what to do with it, because it is pure narrative, and that's unusual in the New Testament.

And also because it is a seedbed of schism. So we come to the book of Acts as though it were a church manual. And so we find evidence there for adult believers' baptism. We find evidence there for infant baptism, covenantal baptism, baptism by immersion, baptism by sprinkling.

We come to Acts and we justify bishops. We come to Acts if we're Presbyterians and we justify elders. And we come to Acts if we're Baptists and we justify congregations. We come to Acts if we are neo-Pentecostals, and there's enough there to justify our experience.

And if we're not neo-Pentecostals, we come there and there's enough there to justify our non-experience. So that's why Acts is such a seedbed for disagreement between us.

And so I think it's very important for us as preachers of Acts, and I want to urge you to be preaching Acts, that we look at the intention of the author. Why did Luke, under the oversight of the Holy Spirit, pen such a book, volume 1, his gospel, volume 2, the book of Acts?

[ 4 : 38 ] Now I could go on about that, but I'm going to take it as read that we accept that Luke is the author of both the gospel and the second volume, Acts. Now let's go back to Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, and look at Luke's introduction here, a shorter version of which occurs at Acts 1, 1 and 2.

And let me just read these four verses for you, and then just make a few points from them. And we're looking for the purpose, why Luke wrote Acts, why it is included in our canon.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Now notice what he doesn't say in verse 1. He doesn't say, I've written an account of the things that happened. He establishes his theme very early. What Luke is writing about is fulfillment, and we'll come back to that in a moment.

[ 5 : 50 ] The things which happened are a fulfillment of the purposes of God, verse 1. His writing is based on eyewitnesses and servants or preachers of the word account.

Verse 3, it results from careful investigation, and what he says is an orderly account. Therefore, context is going to be very important in both gospel and acts, because things have been ordered deliberately by Luke.

And he is writing for this man, Theophilus. His name means lover of God. We know nothing more about him than that. He may have been an authoritative leader in Rome with some influence there, but most commentators believe that he was probably a man of some wealth who was going to be the patron of Luke in his writing of volume 1 and volume 2.

But notice that he is writing for him that he might have certainty. And if you have your Greek text there, you'll see that the last word, Luke uses his last words well, the last word of the introduction is the word certainty.

Now, the linchpin between volume 1 and volume 2 comes at the end of volume 1 and the beginning of volume 2, as you would expect.

[ 7 : 15 ] So go over to Luke 24, verses 46 to 48. And here we find our Lord Jesus, having appeared to the two on the Emmaus Road, the resurrected Christ.

In verse 45, it says, Then Jesus opened their minds, the disciples, so that they could understand the scriptures. He told them, This is what is written.

The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

If you see, here is the first part of the linchpin. If you're going to start preaching on Acts, you must start here. You see, verse 46 could be said to be a very good summary of volume 1, the suffering, the resurrection of Christ.

And verse 47 could be seen to be a very good summary of volume 2, repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem.

[ 8 : 21 ] But we need to notice as well that the Lord Jesus prefaces this remark by saying, It is written. See, here is what is to be fulfilled. Here is the word. Here is the purpose of God.

Here is the missionary heart of God. And would you notice that if you deny verse 46, well, you're a heretic, aren't you? But today, I think quite commonly, it is appropriate that people think that it's okay to deny verse 47.

But it is as much the purpose of God that verse 47 be fulfilled as verse 46 be fulfilled. We wouldn't dream of denying the facts of salvation history, the death, resurrection of Jesus.

Then why do we treat as of lesser importance the progress of the gospel, repentance and forgiveness of sins from Jerusalem to all the nations of the earth? Because that is equally part of the purposes of God, which is to be fulfilled.

Now, that is the first part of the linchpin. Go over now to Acts chapter 1, verse 8, and you'll see the clear link here with what Luke tells us, the pre-ascended Jesus, just before his ascension, says to the disciples, their concern about the future of Israel, etc.

[ 9 : 32 ] And Jesus says, this is to be their proper concern. Verse 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.

Here are the purposes of God. The purpose of God is that salvation be established and the good news, the momentous news of that salvation should move from Jerusalem into the suburbs of Judea, into Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth.

And as it is in Acts, comes to Rome itself. Now, I put it to you that Acts 1.8 probably provides for us an excellent structure for the book of Acts.

So you have, first of all, in these concentric circles, you will receive the Holy Spirit, he will come down on you, and he will enable witness, where? Well, that's chapters 1 to 7.

In chapters 1 to 7 of Acts, we see the gospel in Jerusalem and the suburbs of Jerusalem in Judea. The founding church is the Jerusalem church.

[ 10 : 39 ] The primary focus of the gospel is the Jew, and Peter is the dominant apostle. Then you come to a period of transition when the gospel goes into Samaria, and that is chapters 8 to 12.

Now, not only do you have Jewish evangelism, but you have evangelism of the Gentiles as well. You have in this section the establishment of the Gentile church at Antioch, and not only is Peter the dominant apostle, but now you have the introduction of Paul.

And then in the third area, you have the ends of the earth from chapter 13, the first missionary journey, through to Paul's coming to Rome in chapter 28, and now the dominant church is the Gentile church at Antioch.

It is the sending church. The Gentile is the focus of evangelism, but the Jew first, and Paul now is the dominant apostle. And so what you're seeing here is the unfolding of the fulfillment of God's plan.

This gospel is unstoppable. It springs from the missionary heart of God. Hostility comes against this gospel in the form of the Jewish religious authorities.

[ 11 : 52 ] Stephen is martyred. James is martyred. But the gospel goes on. Internal hypocrisy comes against this gospel in chapter 5 with Ananias and Sapphira. Internal dissension, the grumbling over the widows in chapter 6.

But the gospel goes on. When the gospel comes to the Gentile territories, now the opposition is not so much theological, but it is economic. And so you have Demetrius and the craftsmen of Ephesus opposing the gospel.

In chapter 16, you have the owners of the fortune teller opposing the gospel. But the gospel goes on. You've then got the theological dissension of chapter 15.

What is the true gospel? But the gospel triumphs. You've then got persecution. You've got jail. You've got floggings. You've got beatings. You've got stonings.

You've got shipwreck. You've got court cases. You've got snakebite. Yet the gospel goes on. And the gospel is unstoppable. Now, therefore, I would say that the melody of the book is God's ongoing superintending work over his church.

[ 13 : 00 ] It is his missionary heart. And God himself will see his gospel reach the ends of the earth. And Acts is here in order to provide for us the mandate for the church to press out beyond the fringe.

And so E.M. Blakelock in his little Tyndale commentary on Acts says and concludes his introduction by saying, it is always sound policy to press beyond the fringe provided it is done with vigor and devotion.

So with the fringe, the fringe might be the house next door, the next street, the next village, the next city, the next country. It is always sound policy to press out because verse 47 is as much the purposes of God as verse 46.

And David Gooding in his excellent commentary on Acts says that as much as the church is mission oriented, the church can be said to be Christian. So we are to be a focused people seeing the fulfillment of the purposes of God.

And Luke is showing us that the gospel is unstoppable in its movement out. Now, just there, I'll turn on this overhead because I think as the preacher, I need somehow to come to terms with the whole

structure of what is being said.

[ 14 : 23 ] And so over your page here, you have this representation of Acts. Not quite in focus. Right. Well, I don't think we can get it all in focus.

I'll have to move it around a bit. Can you? Is that fine? Is that better? No, it's worse. Okay. Okay. You've got it on your page there.

So you might like to follow. So what you've got here is an attempt to represent what is happening in Acts. So you've got Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit at the very core.

Then you've got, notice going vertically, you've got the gospel going from Jerusalem, Judea, up to Samaria. and notice that down here, this says these events were catalysts for the spread of the gospel.

The martyrdom for Stephen and the spread of people from Jerusalem meant that they went into Antioch and into Samaria. And then the next catalyst you have is the conversion of Saul, who was going to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

[ 15 : 28 ] And then the gospel ultimately reaches Rome. So what you've got here is Jerusalem and Judea. You've got the transitional zone and then you've got the gospel reaching out to the Gentile world.

The word is going out first by Peter here and then by Paul, first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles, though the Jews are not excluded. Down here, you have the various statistical summaries which Luke gives you throughout his work because Luke is plotting the progress of this gospel.

So all along the way, he's reminding us in his narrative that the gospel is doing well under the superintendency of God. And then out here, you have the various missionary journeys and then down here marked in a star is the various occasions in which the gospel is preached to Jews and with the diamond, the occasion in which the gospel is preached to Gentiles.

Now, all I'm trying to do at this point is to get on top of the narrative, get on top of my material. And so I might put it like this. So on the next page, the gospel is starting at Jerusalem and it's heading to Rome.

Christ ascends, arrow up, gospel goes out, spirit descends. Then you have the first sign of opposition from the Sanhedrin. You have also extra opposition, the potential to slow down the movement of the new covenant ministry out by the hypocrisy and the complaint of the widows.

[ 17 : 07 ] Then you have the election of deacons and Stephen, Stephen's martyrdom, the gospel goes to Samaria, Philip goes to Samaria, then the conversion of Saul for the Gentiles, the vision of Peter to go and minister to the Gentile Cornelius, first missionary journey, Jerusalem council, punctuated or bracketed by the missionary journeys.

We must get the gospel right. The third missionary journey in the commercial opposition, Paul goes to Jerusalem and is opposed by the Sanhedrin. Then he goes to three court cases and there is the sense of seeking to frustrate him at every point.

But finally, he comes to Rome and even on the way to Rome, there is the storm, there is the shipwreck, there is the snake bite. But finally, he comes safely and securely to Rome itself.

Now, all I'm seeking to do when I just draw up myself a network is I'm trying in a narrative, in any narrative book, I'm trying to get on top of the major movements of the narrative.

So I think it's important to be able to summarise the big movements of the narrative. Now, what is Luke showing us here? He is showing us that this book is good for us because it will clarify our vision.

[ 18 : 27 ] God's purpose is for the whole world and it will strengthen our faith in God as the great sovereign evangelist of the book of Acts and the Lord Jesus as the involved head of the church.

Wesley said, God buries his messengers but never his message. If you just go over to Acts chapter 19 and you see just one example of that where Paul comes to the end of his church planting ministry.

Acts chapter 19. You remember that Paul has just planted the gospel, the church in Ephesus and Luke sums up in verse 20, chapter 19, in this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Paul's pioneer missionary days were now over. Paul had planted his last church, the church at Ephesus and is it not significant that in the next 20 or so verses Luke lists no fewer than 10 of Paul's co-workers.

You look at them there, verse 22, he sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus and then down to verse 29, soon the whole city was in uproar, the people seized Gaius, Aristarchus and the others and there are no fewer over the page, chapter 20, verse 4, he was accompanied by Sopetus, son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, Tychicus, etc.

[ 20 : 00 ] So here's, Paul's come to an end, his pioneering days are over but don't despair because the gospel hasn't come to an end. Paul will go but the gospel will not go and immediately he tells us of these 10, he lists 10 co-workers, these are the men who are going to carry the gospel on.

So God buries his messengers but never his message, clarifies my vision, God's concern is for the world, strengthens my faith in God as the sovereign evangelist.

The church is not a human institution, the Lord Jesus rules and God has great oversight of his ministry, burying his messengers but the message will carry on until Christ comes.

All right, let's look at some themes then and I'm going to take the themes that I think that Luke would emphasise for us. It's interesting that one of the characteristics of Luke is that he repeats what he wants to emphasise.

I don't know whether Luke was a father or not but he acts like a father. He says, I'm telling you once, I'm telling you twice, I'm telling you three times and he does, with all of these matters that I've listed there under point four, three times in the account he tells us.

[ 21 : 14 ] This happened, he tells us again and he tells us again. So the first issue to notice with Luke is that he gives us three Pentecosts and we rightly emphasise the first one.

The first one was to the Jews in Jerusalem but the second one, the Holy Spirit comes on the second people group, the Samaritans in chapter eight. We'll be looking at some difficulties of that tomorrow and then the third occasion is when the Holy Spirit comes on the Gentile church, Cornelius and his family.

Not only is the Holy Spirit coming on the church in order to empower all the church, Jews, Samaritan, Gentile to be missionaries but the Holy Spirit is coming as the source of their union in Christ.

The Holy Spirit links them to Jesus. He is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and therefore he is the source of their union and so Luke wants us to know that this is a Spirit-infused group of people.

Do we have confidence in the Holy Spirit? Now my own experience was that I was converted and I very soon became a Pentecostal. Someone came along to me and asked me well how do you praise God and I said well I thank you.

[ 22 : 31 ] He said I didn't ask you how you thank God I asked you how you praise God. Oh I thought I don't know. He said that's right you need a special language to thank God with and so I was baptized in the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues accompanying.

So if anybody asks me what's my baptismal experience I say I was baptized as a child when I was six months old I was baptized in the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues after I became a Christian and I was baptized in a Baptist church so I can pastor anyone I reckon with that sort of baptismal policy.

You see now of course I got straightened out in my thinking and my understanding of my Christian experience as I went along but one thing I think now that I've come on is have I still got the same confidence in God the Holy Spirit who lives in me to do his work through me and to empower me for witness.

Now I need to ask myself that it's very easy to point fingers at our Pentecostal brethren but we need to point our fingers back at ourselves. How much do we show the bold witnesses as typical of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit?

How bold for example is my witness? I think it's a very good question to ask. The other day I've become addicted to Burrow Markets because that's where we live in London for the two months we're there and my wife and I every day I think we've visited Burrow Markets it's a wonderful place and the other day I was sitting there and there was a man outside this wonderful coffee shop and Burrow Markets and he's sitting there and I got my coffee and I sat there too and I thought well I'll just wonder how an Englishman does an Englishman just sit there when there's someone sitting next to him and he just sat there he didn't say a thing and I said well this is good coffee isn't it?

[ 24 : 17 ] Well I couldn't stop him talking he said yes it's very good coffee every time I'm in London I come and have coffee here I said well where are you from? I'm from Newcastle Newcastle they've got the Sydney Harbour Bridge there in Newcastle they're smaller yes that's right are you from

Australia what do you do for it?

what are you doing in London? I'm preaching here at a church I'm speaking at a group for preachers see you've got to speak speak up you never know where that conversation will go I think we beat our heads get out there and witness with the gospel here's the four spiritual laws give it to them look get out there and start a conversation and see where that conversation will lead now have I got similar confidence in the spirit to do his work he is here to empower speech to empower bold witness and I think that is the great theme running through the book of Acts whatever happens happens under the oversight of Christ empowered by his spirit secondly Saul Paul's conversion let's look at chapter 9 it occurs three times this is a significant conversion the arch persecutor of the church becomes an apostle of the church chapter 9 meanwhile Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples he went to the high priest he got letters of credential to find any in Damascus who belonged to the way he'd bring them back to Jerusalem whether men or women as he need Damascus on his journey suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him he fell to the ground and he heard a voice saying to him

Saul Saul why do you persecute me now here is the first instance the first record of it notice the solemn repetition of the name Moses Moses Saul Saul question why it is unreasonable why do you persecute me now Saul may well have said I'm only persecuting those Christians to persecute them is to persecute me as Dick said last night to love the brethren is to be in fellowship with God why do you persecute me it is personal who Saul says who are you Lord now Jesus could have said yes I'm Lord and Paul could have thought well that's Yahweh but Jesus says I am Jesus whom you are persecuting now get up and go into the city and he'll be told to you what you must do and in that instance Saul realizes that the crucified one the one that he hated now lives and remember how Ananias comes to him and verse 19 tells us

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the son of God now if you'd have gone to synagogue that Saturday morning and seen this bloke Saul there and heard what he said you would wonder what is going on now that is the first account go over to chapter 22 and now we have the second account of this most significant turning point now remember by the time Luke comes to chapter 22 he could have said look just refer back to my previous scroll what happened but he doesn't here in front of the crowd at Jerusalem notice how Paul verse 1 speaks to them in Aramaic and speaks to them in very respectful terms brothers and fathers listen now to my defense and when they heard him speak in their mother tongue Aramaic they became very quiet and he tells them of his experience go down to verse 12 a man named Ananias came to see me he was a devout observer of the law so Paul is emphasizing his Jewish roots every person involved namely Ananias was a good Jew he was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there he stood beside me and said brother Saul receive your sight and at that very moment

I was able to see then he said the God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth now at this point I gather that the crowd in Jerusalem are quite happy to accept that the testimony of Paul is that he has seen Christ who is the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth but he goes on you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard now get up what are you waiting for get up and be baptized wash your sins away calling on his name when I returned to Jerusalem was praying at the temple I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking quick he said leave Jerusalem immediately because they will not accept your testimony about me Lord I replied these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you and when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him then the Lord said to me now at this point the crowd's listening then the Lord said to me go

[ 29 : 18 ] I will send you far away to the Gentiles and that was it the Gentiles how did oh the crowd listen unto Paul said this then they said rid the earth of him rid the earth of him he's not fit to live so what you see here is ethnic prejudice he is a nation if you like of older brothers from the parable of the prodigal son they had by birth and they were not going to share it freely they'd worked very hard for their relationship with God and they weren't going to share it freely with the nations with the Gentiles and so what you have here is opposition based on ethnic prejudice and parochialism we'd rather they went to hell than that you go to the Gentiles alright third one chapter 26 Paul before Festus and the Herodian Agrippa and again Luke could have saved himself a lot of effort refer back

to my previous accounts but he doesn't here Paul stands up and he speaks before Festus and he tells him what has happened

I will rescue you verse 17 from your own people and from the Gentiles I'm sending you to them to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and so Paul goes on and he tells Agrippa and Festus of his experience and then he comes in verse 21 and explains what has happened to him that is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me but I have had God's help to this very day and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen that the Christ would suffer and as the first to rise from the dead would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles now notice it is at this point that the pagan secular mind interrupts Paul the religious parochial mind interrupts him at the point of Gentile evangelism here Festus interrupts him and says you're out of your mind at the mention of resurrection your learning is driving you insane now here it's at this point that we see for the pagan secular mind this is where we are to be with the resurrection of Jesus if we are to be at the apologetic centre of the gospel oh look you're out of your mind we knew the Romans death is the end there's nothing beyond death oh you're out of your mind no he is the one who would suffer and he was the one who was the first to rise from the dead and what got in the craw of Festus was this mention of resurrection so I had a young bloke say to me just before I left Sydney look do I have to believe

Joan was in the belly of the fish for three days do I have to believe that creation God created things in six days to be a Christian I said what you have to do is you have to confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead that will make you a Christian and all those other things will fall into place this is where we need to be on the resurrection of Jesus when I was doing graduate work in Sydney at university I did a course on cosmology very popular course there were four in the class and so the lecturer said would you like to come to my study for lectures so I came we came to his study for lectures and one night he's working through all the various Greek philosophies and one night we were doing Pythagoras now all I knew about Pythagoras was the sum of the square and the hypotenuse you know all that Pythagorean theory and this bloke said you know he said if I weren't a Christian I'd be a Pythagorean and I thought to myself why would you be a Pythagorean but there was a lady in the group and she said why would you be a Christian it's funny

I was thinking why would you be a Pythagorean and she said why would you be a Christian and he said oh he said I'm a historian and I've got no other way of explaining the resurrection of Jesus than that's what happened that's why I'm a Christian and then he just lectured on and it was just that sort of brilliant little moment there and then we all moved on very well mannered people we weren't going to argue in class over things like that but he said that's why I'm a Christian you know that great line of Blaise Pascal atheist arguments are unclear what reason do they have for saying that the dead will not rise which is the greater miracle birth or death that which never was comes into being birth or that which was comes into being again resurrection surely the latter is a lesser miracle than the former and yet we take birth for granted why not then resurrection there's a place to be Festus you're out of your mind talking about what are you talking about now this is what I'm talking about now I reckon that Luke is repeating this not only to remind us that this is a significant conversion but to show us something of the nature of opposition to the gospel bearer the opposition that will confront you and me is far more irrational than the faith which it attacks you're out of your mind you're insane stone him to death rid the earth of him that's what you find throughout the book of Acts shut them up lock them away close them down silence them never sit down let's talk about this never that never engagement the opposition which we face is far more irrational than the faith which it attacks and therefore because of that we know that we are the most free of all we're free to read anything student came to me one time and said are we allowed to read the

Quran I said sure do you want me to start a tutorial on readings of the Quran got nothing to fear from the Quran it'll only cause you to love the gospel more so here we find opposition from religion parochial prejudice chapter 22 opposition from the secular pagan unthinking closed mindedness festus and we are to be pressing constantly beyond the fringe now the third theme is Cornelius so if you just go back there to chapter 10 remember how God prepares Peter I love just reading Acts and I'm a diet junkie you wouldn't know that by looking at me but you tell me a new diet and I start it and I'm always swimming or doing something to get fit and just before I started away I started going to a boot camp in Sydney I don't know if you've been to a boot camp but our boot camp in

[ 36 : 11 ] Sydney is run by this Lebanese lady who's got a six pack you know all these incredible muscles and we all get down there at a quarter to six in the morning and she puts us she makes us box and she makes us run and then she makes us jump into the pool and wrestle each other and fight and build up all our muscles and the first week I went they match you up in pairs and so the first week I went they matched me up with this lady who was about my age who was 60 who was so she was she was so nice to me you know she oh David you're doing so well you know and I think oh and the next week they matched me up with another lady but she was about 20 years younger than me and very fit and she was constantly come on get up come on you're too slow move along move along and I always think of that when I read this section just look at chapter 9 of Acts so here you've got here you've got Enos and Peter travelling along verse 34 Jesus Christ heals you get up and take care of your mat and then you go to

Tabitha in verse 40 Peter sent them all out of the room and turning around to the dead woman he said Tabitha get up so on two occasions now Peter's told someone to get up and get going but then if you go to chapter 10 verse 13 the boots on the other foot the angel comes to Peter and says get up you get up you're good at telling other people get up now you get up you kill and eat and then in down in chapter 10 verse 26 Peter comes to the house of Cornelius and he says to Cornelius who pays him reverence get up man get on your feet just interesting get up get up get up get up now what's happening here is that Peter needs to have a special vision of God and there the special vision comes that there's a mixture of clean and unclean food and he is told verse 13 get up Peter kill and eat and you know the great sermon by J.C.

Ryle surely not Lord if he is Lord you cannot say surely not if he's Lord there's no surely not if he's the Lord then you do as you're told I've never eaten anything impure or unclean and of course what Peter is learning is that just as it is now inappropriate to draw a distinction between clean and unclean food so it is important to draw that distinction it is no longer appropriate to draw a distinction between clean and unclean people and so when he goes to the house of Cornelius he is received there verse 28 he said to them you are well aware now this is not a great opening line for evangelism either you are well aware that is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him but God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean so when I was sent for I came without raising any objection may I ask you why you sent for me does that not surprise you I think Homer Simpson the word is duh why are they sent for you why is this man who is so opportunistic with the gospel when he has an evangelistic audience presented to him on a platter why is he so thick to understand that this also is an opportunity for the gospel go back if you keep your finger there and go back to Luke 24 and I think it is because of

Peter's reading of scripture look at those verses in Luke 24 verse 46 and 47 Luke 24 verse 46 and 47 this is how I think Peter understood these key verses this is what is written that the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to the Jews of all nations beginning at Jerusalem it hadn't occurred to Peter that God's purposes should also include the Gentiles and so when he comes to the house of Cornelius he says may I ask why you sent for me and then it finally dawns on him when they say look we're all here Cornelius tells him what's happened we all want to hear and listen to you and so Peter then verse 34 says I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism and he preaches the gospel to them and was he going to call on them to repent and believe we don't know but he didn't even have the opportunity because just as I am before he got to that the Holy Spirit falls on them and

God takes the whole transaction out of the hands of Peter while Peter was still speaking these words the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message and the circumcised believers who had now come with Peter saw that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles it's interesting isn't it that Luke introduces the circumcised believers as that's the issue these people are uncircumcised and yet they have received the Holy Spirit just as we had in the beginning now this is repeated for us in chapter 11 because the news gets to Jerusalem even before Peter does and when Peter gets to Jerusalem the brothers in Jerusalem verse 3 say so we heard that you entered the house of uncircumcised men and you ate with them we heard this and so Peter tells them exactly what happened and when verse 18 when they heard this they had no further objections and praised God so then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life I think it's just telling isn't it the way Luke records for us the conversion of these people that God has granted the

[ 41 : 52 ] Gentiles repentance unto life if you go over to chapter 13 verse 48 when the Gentiles heard this they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord and all who are appointed for eternal life believed and then if you go over to Lydia in chapter 16 and her conversion Acts chapter 16 verse 14 when she was converted the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message God is the sovereign evangelist I mean Luke was a Calvinist before Calvin even existed that's the reality who is active here is it clever apologia is it some great evangelist no it's God opening hearts it's God granting repentance it's God giving gifts of life to people so this is a major turning point God's purposes are for the Gentiles as well as the Jews and that is repeated in chapter 11 and it is repeated finally before the

Jerusalem council in chapter 15 so that's Cornelius and the other thing about Cornelius that we shouldn't neglect is there in verse 36 of chapter 10 you know the message that God sent to the people of Israel telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all and just just as a sidelight as we move on we notice that this Cornelius is a centurion a God-fearing man respected by all with his God-fearing man respected by all yet he still had to come to Christ it was not enough that he be God-fearing it was not enough that he be a pillar of society that was not enough that he respected by all without the peace that comes through Jesus Christ he was not right with God and so Cornelius had to turn to Christ and be filled and baptized with the Holy Spirit as well and finally the last issue was the Jerusalem council which is repeated the letter of the council is repeated for us three times as well chapter 15 and notice here that it comes between the first and second missionary journey and the question is does should the gospel include an additive of the need to be circumcised so some people were going down to the Antiochian church and telling the men there that they needed to be circumcised to be true

Christians which no doubt was quite upsetting to them and Paul of course writes a whole letter about this to the Galatians and I think if you're looking for a date for Galatians it's there in 1428 and they stay there a long time with the disciples and it's probably at that point that Paul writes his letter to the Galatians well before the council itself preference is given to Peter the primary apostle to the Jews Barnabas again finds his place in front of Paul because of course he was the representative of the Jerusalem church to Antioch so now it's Barnabas and Paul before the Jerusalem council they tell what God has done and Peter sums up the principle in verse 11 of chapter 15 we believe that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved just as they are there it is it's by grace we are saved just as they are I remember when my father became a Christian at the age of 50 up to that point in our family's life Christianity was teased and mocked in our family and and I can remember my father's great loves were cricket beer and cigarettes and I loved cricket with him he I always poured his beer he taught me how to pour a perfect beer and I always went to the shops to buy his cigarettes and one day he came into my bedroom and said I've become a Christian and I thought you are kidding because he was a great teaser my father and he's just out with a work mate that day and the work mate said to him

Bruce it's a wonderful thing to be a Christian and this bloke had worked on my father for 12 months and just at that point my father said yes it must be a wonderful thing to be a Christian and came home told my mother that he'd become a Christian and they got by the bed and committed their lives to Christ it was a remarkable thing and I found that my dad started reading the Bible and praying early in the morning I know I never again poured him a beer I never again bought him any cigarettes he changed completely as a man who I think was basically angry to a much more rounded person it was a remarkable thing two years later though I was determined not to be a Christian I got converted as well and then some blokes came to our house they must have heard about us and they brought the latest technology they had a slide projector and they made this presentation for their religion and they were really nice men and the next day my father said what did you think about that last night I said I thought it was pretty good he said do you think we should have them back I said well they were not yeah it was good good slide projector wasn't it he's and my dad said no I don't think we will have them back they never mentioned grace or faith did you notice that now here's my father a young

Christian but he knew enough to know that the absence of grace and faith language indicated that these blokes weren't quite where we were and they weren't either they they didn't mention grace and faith now here it is see we know we believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved just as they are now that is the principle James sums up and says this is consistent with what God says in the scriptures by quoting from Amos and then you have verse 19 to 21 the letter of the

Jerusalem council to reassure the the Gentiles and to remind them that engagement in pagan temple activities is no longer appropriate for those who are in Christ that letter is repeated again in chapter 15 verse 23 and it is repeated its provisions are repeated again in chapter 21 verse 25 there is only one gospel it's no good having missionary journeys if you are taking the wrong gospel out to the world so you get the gospel right on Sunday morning at St

[ 48 : 16 ] Helens I met this fine young man called George he's just a terrific young fellow I think he's about 17 years of age and he was quite strapping and I said what do you do do you play rugby said no I'm a rower I said oh that's terrific I said so do you practice a lot yes he said we practice a lot and I said we had a student who was a rower as well and he used to get out every morning and row and then one morning they had a visit from the Australian Olympic rowing coach and they turned this man's practice around you know what he said he this is what he said to them he said you've heard it said that practice makes perfect he said that's a lot of rubbish he put it in a more colloquially Australian way than that he said that's a lot of rubbish only perfect practice makes perfect because if you get out there and you start practicing and yet with the wrong sort of use of your elbows or whatever you're just teaching yourself to do something in the wrong way only perfect practice makes perfect and I reckon that we've got to be constantly doing this that there's a church in Australia it has 50 missionaries on the field now that's impressive but how often do you sit them down when they come back from a tour of service and say tell us the gospel you've been sharing just tell us remind us of it again and actually examine them it's no good having 50 missionaries on the field if 30 of them are sharing a gospel which is not the true gospel now here between the first and second missionary journeys the church is saying this is the gospel and what is the gospel about it's about Jesus and it's about Jesus without additives did you notice that in Acts chapter 2 Peter on the day of Pentecost preaches Jesus that with the healing of the beggar in chapter 3 Peter doesn't preach healing he preaches Jesus it is Jesus who is preached to Jews it is Jesus in Acts 17 30 and 31 who is preached without actually being named it is always about Jesus listen to these titles of Jesus in Acts

Christ son of David son of man Lord leader author of life prophet like Moses holy and righteous one the shortest definition of the gospel in the New Testament is the one that Paul lists in Galatians we went about preaching him him that is the gospel without additive and what Luke is saying here is that Christianity is not Judaism it's not just a sect of Judaism where you've got to be circumcised it's not philosophy like the Stoics and the Epicureans it's not political we're on about another king like Caesar in Thessalonica and it's not spiritism it's not just being spiritually aware that girl in Philippi was spiritually aware but that's not what Christianity is about it's about Jesus and I put down there at in the midpoint of your page the little Greek word day now this word occurs 40 times in the book of Acts and as you know it means it must happen Luke shows that this gospel is reaching out through spirit empowered messengers under God's direction it must happen the whole melody of this book is fulfillment it must happen God will gather his people from the far ends of the earth Christ will direct his church Christ will fill his church with his spirit it must happen and this is the ongoing charter for the church okay we've been going nearly an hour so we better stop questions or comments you might like to make yes yes yes yes I'll be doing that tomorrow and the next day so that let's let's now go to structure so if you turn over your page there let me just jump to structure I think that's important though that we get that background with acts in our mind now let's get on to the practice and come back Simon if I'm not answering that so you've got to work out with the length of a sermon series how much your congregation can take I often think that we're not sensitive enough to the needs of our congregation I think we we are committed to respect the word of God but we need to be committed to respect our congregations as well and I think I had a friend in Sydney who preached through Job in a year now can you imagine that that means that for us he's in those dark chapters of Job in July August which for us are the dark months of winter you know imagine turning up to church again Sunday morning what's he on this week oh Job 22 Job 23 he took a whole year on Job I mean it's just too much can't bear it can't take it so we've got to determine how long your people can take a series now in Australia we basically have 10 week terms school terms we have four terms a year 10 weeks each we go to a central Sydney congregation where we go to church and I reckon three I reckon that most people in that church even the keenest attend church three out of four times so you cannot assume that if you do a series over 10 weeks that everybody's going to get the series so I think that you can't assume a context that's what I'm saying therefore what I would do as I've suggested here in a series over two terms I

would do one series of 13 weeks and one series of nine weeks I don't want to skim when it comes to Acts one church I was involved in one time we did Deuteronomy in five weeks well you haven't done it at all have you you don't tick it off think we've done it because we're doing six or seven chapters at a time and therefore you're just skimming so

I want a realistic section and I want a title that is attractive so I've called the first series a great tonic so in Australia I'm sure over here too it's very cheap to get magnets for the fridge and you can just put on there a great tonic Acts one to twelve and have people stick it on the fridge that's what we're going to be getting this term at church so that they start praying for you hopefully if they see that they'll start praying for you a great tonic you see if you're not enthusiastic about your ministry no one else is going to be enthusiastic about it so start putting out fridge magnets everywhere oh I remember that series on the great tonic there's a it's a great it's a great quote there that's how I would lead the way with a great tonic now what I've done week one I will do the introductory talk on why this is going to be such a brilliant book for us to study chapter one will things be different now that Jesus has ascended the coming of the spirit week three the sermon at Pentecost the healing the sign the healing of the beggar in three handling hostility handling hypocrisy taking the first chapter six one to seven taking the first reference in six seven to the health of the word of God and I'll also in that sermon preach on chapter 12 where also the word of God is mentioned in its health and again in chapter 19 where the word of God is preached the first martyr Stephen expansion to Samaria a surprising conversion now

[ 55 : 53 ] Simon it's at that point that I'm going to preach on 9 22 and 26 I'm going to put them all together and preach one sermon on the conversion of Saul and show why this how the second and the third are slightly different in terms of the opposition that comes to Paul from the religious and the opposition that comes from the secular pagan mind so I'll do it all in that sermon okay yep then I do God's expansive work through Peter and then God's hidden hand at work in chapter 12 which is a brilliant chapter just to show God's sovereign care okay now any other questions about that thanks for that that's in answer to your question Simon okay any other questions or comments yes yeah I I wouldn't recap personally because I don't want to make too many concessions to those who aren't there I want to reward those who are there and so I I think it's always good not to make too many concessions though I can say whoever's leading the service can say you can get a copy of last week's sermon that's available on the website or whatever but I think that these pretty much you will be able to bring out the distinctive melody of these sections they are not dependent so much on what has happened before you can just mention that in a passing way if you think that there's something for example if you are going to do week four week six you'd have to mention the sign that is referred to there of last week which is the healing of the beggar that's why they're hostile and so I could just flip back quite easily in just 10 seconds or so and mention the healing of the beggar yeah so just just be aware of that and I've just got to be aware that I am preaching as though I've got a brand new congregation this week yeah anything else yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes that's right well well yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah and I think you've got to that's right you know you can imagine the young men they've just carried Ananias out and then you're going to carry her out too sorry yeah well I would but I would anticipate that why doesn't God act like that today he acts in more much more passive ways in his judgment today but that is a good issue that I would anticipate with regard to interpreting narrative and I've said that Acts is the only example I think of pure narrative in the New Testament there are the Gospels of course but with the

Gospels you have the activities of Jesus and his authoritative interpretive word backing the activity up so you've got no doubt what the meaning of the sign is or the event is but in Acts you just told it and therefore I think that you listen to Luke and you get some clues I've got a paper down here on this which is just an outline I'm not going to go into it in detail but the things Luke repeats are the key things the key words he uses his statistical summaries are giving things away the space he gives to things and his relentless focus on Jesus see it is incredible isn't it that when you come to the martyrdom the death in chapter 12 of James an apostle he is given one verse in fact it's the instrumental dative James by sword he's dead he's an apostle but when you come to a deacon a man who's not even an apostle Stephen how many verses he's given 75 verses now why is Luke giving so many verses to Stephen and only one verse to James see it is the narrative as the narrative director he's saying look this one is significant why why is it significant because it's a catalyst for the big picture the movement of the gospel to Samaria and to the ends of the earth and that's what the narrative is about whereas the death of James has neither doesn't affect the gospel

one way or another really as it turns out so I think you're looking for hints what is his passionate concern his passionate concern is the gospel his passionate concern is the gospel on the move the gospel unstoppable the gospel fulfilling the purposes of God yeah sorry up the back there yes yeah no I wouldn't have the reading of the entire section I just take out the core that I'm going to perhaps preach on so I wouldn't do the whole bit so last week I preached on Luke 15 the prodigal son but I was going to refer to the lost coin and the lost sheep but we just read the prodigal son it's far too long otherwise so here if I was going to do God's expansive purpose I think I would Luke Acts 10 to 11 I think I'd just take the section of the vision to Peter that would that that's where I'd start and I'd refer to lead them through the narrative elsewhere yes yes yeah yeah yeah yeah that's right yeah thanks for that anything else yes yes yes they are well I wouldn't deal with them I wouldn't do I wouldn't deal any focus on them because I don't think the director Luke is focusing on them they sense in which they come and go and it's like that in the gospels isn't it that the camera is always on Jesus but you'd love it to be elsewhere sometimes like I'd love to go with the Ethiopian unit back to the treasury of Candace and see what difference does this make to this chancellor of the exchequer do you know do the other administrators notice what's happened to all I don't know what they call them old unit or something what's happened to but wouldn't you love to be there when the reunion takes place but Luke is showing us the gospel his focus on the gospel so in the gospels his focus is on Jesus and in Acts his focus is on the gospel of Jesus and so I wouldn't get involved terribly in character studies though I'd be tempted to I think with Barnabas because quite a bit is made of Barnabas and the centurions throughout Acts they're always in a very good light aren't they and every mention of Barnabas is such a positive thing Peter's zeal but his blindness that's that's a good one and Paul's impatience with John Mark shows that he's not a perfect man either but I think that they sort of come and go in a way so I wouldn't focus there okay let's come back we need to get through this material okay sorry about that then in the second series series I just take the theme as the unstoppable gospel our mother church watching the name etc now I don't want to get too much involved in that structure because tomorrow we're going to move through that and I'm going to look at each of the sermons and tell you what I think is the big idea or the melody line and the way it might be introduced and the way it might be applied at the foot of the page you'll see helpful resources these are just the ones I've found helpful FF Bruce Stott and the IVP Griffith Thomas his outline studies on acts and his commentary on acts excellent for structure Griffith Thomas in his outline studies I found really helpful like Matthew Henry's commentary in the six volume series excellent helpful insights into the text I know that in Australia you can get Matthew Henry's abridged commentary in one volume and it's not worth buying because they abridge all the good things out of it but if you get the six volume commentary I remember turning up and preaching in a church one day and an old lady came out and she said oh it's the same every week I hear what you fellas say and then I go home and I read old Matthew Henry and there's significant more light there so it was greatly encouraged just go and read Matthew Henry so it's terrific to have your six volumes there and just have a look leave it by your bed it's good bedtime reading just have a look at what Matthew Henry says before you go off to sleep Robert Tannehill good for identifying the literary connections F Scott Spencer I'll say more about him in a moment the Tyndale Press has two commentaries the earlier one by Blakelock the later one by Howard Marshall preacher friendly because they are succinct Ben Wetherington that's the big fat commentary on acts the largest most exhaustive commentary then you've got the Dennis Johnson ones Chris Green the word of his grace I didn't look at that one but in evangelicals now Chris Kelly of [ 65 : 26 ] Lansdowne Baptist said good things about it then lives of Paul then Gordon Keddie's commentary in the whirlwind series and David Gooding's commentary now I don't know how many commentaries you read before you do a sermon series but I'm assuming that if you're doing say four series a year and you're preaching at least once every Sunday you can't read too many commentaries I therefore have a rule that I read three commentaries and as I'm going to say tomorrow morning I don't read them too early in the preparation process I try and read a technical commentary a semi-technical commentary and a devotional commentary I find if I read more than that then I just get confused because they've all got different views about things so the three I would read here that I found particularly helpful were the one by FF Bruce in the Greek text the one by Scott Spencer the literary cultural reading and then the one by David Gooding true to the faith in the gospel folio pressed which is just great it's just that that just reads like preached material that's

really interesting I think

David Gooding is a brethren from over here but I found that really helpful but if I was going to go for one I'd go for Scott Spencer's one I think that is an outstanding commentary the literary cultural reading of the text of Acts by F Scott Spencer it's really helpful really very helpful but those three I think would be the three that I'd be looking at okay now I want to look at finally the receiving society of Acts just what sort of a society was it that the gospel was being preached into and I think this is on your green no the receiving society yes yes it is thanks other side okay on your green sheet thanks for that just a number of things we can say definitely about this society into which the gospel came first of all it was a society of many gods many religions Christianity was one amongst many we have Artemis of the Ephesians we have the various cults and soothsayers and fortune tellers we have the Jewish sons of Sceva we have

Elimas the sorcerer Simon the sorcerer so we can say first and foremost that this was a spiritual society it was a society in which there was a great spiritual sensitivity if you like fortune tellers even people who were intelligent people had their fortune tellers beside them in their soothsayers beside them as you see in chapter 13 secondly it is a multicultural society look at the different language groups we find 15 different language groups at Pentecost and even within Judaism we know that there were people from a Hebraic and people from a Greek background so it is multiculturalism thirdly there was the individual ability to be an arbiter of the truth so in the Pharisees and the Sadducees within Judaism you pick your philosophical school Epicureanism or Stoicism so the individual he had the ability to pick in the supermarket of ideas in the supermarket of religions but over all of this is tolerance because if Rome was to maintain the unity of the empire Rome would tolerate anything except intolerance so if there was to be one empire then you could not have friction working towards disunity over religion and therefore there were legal religions and illegal religions and Judaism was a legal religion it was different to the others but all the same it was legal and Christianity was safe as long as it was seen under the shelter of Judaism and so we know that the early Roman emperors some of them basically saw Christianity as a sect of

Judaism therefore it was safe but the Romans never understood Christianity so you can imagine a young man coming down the road with his wife and family and the centurion who was a good man says oh excuse me just just come over and sprinkle some incense to the altar to the emperor and the young man says no I can't do that Jesus Christ is Lord and you can imagine look the centurion says look you look a fine man lovely wife lovely child don't don't get yourself into trouble well I'm not asking you to do the impossible just sprinkle some incense on the altar and say that Caesar is Lord and then you can go off and believe whatever you like I'm asking you to change your lifestyle in any way here just do it please Jesus Christ is Lord right take him away dip him in pitch put him in the emperor's garden burn him to death

Rome simply didn't understand for Rome to say Caesar is Lord sure just do it and then go off and do your own thing religion was never a life-changing issue to the Romans it is something you went and did but it made no impression on your life if you like it was the Nike religion just do it is do it and therefore Rome never understood Jews they ate they gave they had a day of rest why it's as though their relationship with God influenced their daily life religion didn't influence daily life in Rome and that's why they never understood the Christians and never understood that the Christians could not be tolerant the civil imperative was always the spiritual impossibility but Rome could never understand why now therefore what I'm saying obviously to you is that the days of acts were like today and the society in Australia is very much like that tolerance we must be tolerant except for those who are not tolerant we don't like fundamentalists of any kind people should be free to shop around this is a multicultural society and we've got to respect one another's backgrounds etc tolerance is the new religion now it is into this sort of society that we preach and it is into this society that the apostles preach just go back to chapter 4 because here is Peter and notice how the apostles respond to this sort of society where tolerance is the new world order

[ 72 : 20 ] Luke reminds us in verse 8 that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit he says look he said just note this Peter's not getting up there just because he's a strong-minded man then Peter he says filled with the Holy Spirit and Peter gets on the front foot before the Jewish authorities and notice what he says in verse 19 when they tell Peter and John that they are to be quiet Peter and John replied judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God for we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard now that is to ever be our response society will strike try and quietness down lock us up they're insane shut them up and we cannot

help speaking about what we have seen and heard I think one of the amazing things in my studies of the book of Acts is to notice that there are 22 direct words from God in the book of Acts God speaks Jesus speaks the angel speaks the spirit speaks the Lord speaks 22 times 16 of those 22 times contain the word go get out there it's as though the spirit is stiff-arming the church to move them out 16 of the 22 words of God move out get out don't let society quiet you down opposition is always more irrational than the faith it attacks to press beyond the fringe is sound policy provided it is done with vigor and devotion gooding says in his commentary on page 139 the church which ceases to be missionary and evangelistic ceases to be christian that's the melody of Acts and that's why we need to be reading it ourselves that's why it's such a great tonic for us and for our congregations as well okay now we've got a few minutes any any questions or comments yes yes i very i personally very rarely use cross-references but sometimes if i i do because i feel once i've got you to turn the page of the bible to another section i've got to grab your attention back again and so i i in order therefore if i'm going to talk about um john says john says i might just say the apostle john says if i don't want them to go back there but i won't say the apostle john says in chapter 1 verse 25 but don't look it up because i've i've given them the hint and there's something about us that wants to do exactly the opposite of what you ask us to do maybe that's the Australian in me um but so so therefore i won't say that so i if but i if i really do want them to look through the narrative here i'm going to get put your finger there and let's just flip over and then now go back to where we were so that's the way i'd do it yes religion you said makes no difference in the eyes of the romans today so the the idea of rome in rome was religion made no difference to life so you had the classic temple idea you go to the temple and you keep the gods happy and then you go away and forget them um do you want me to say yeah well yeah that's right so uh um the principle at our theological college always used to say religion is rebellion there is no pure reform of rebellion than religion if you define religion as humankind's attempt to win god's favor and to keep god's favor then that is rebellion and i think that uh we're going to look more at this tomorrow at the nature of religion what religion says to people

is cruel because it demands of them an impossible response that they do things perfectly and we can't do it doubly cruel because it threatens us with the worst punishment if we don't do it anything else yes yes yes to a local congregation well we might be able to if you do it properly and if you if you um if you break it up into chunks and i think part of that is because we're not trained to read in church the way you read narnia to your children is in a relational setting and you're probably putting lots of emphasis in it but you don't do that in the way you read the bible in church they'd think there's something wrong with you if you did it there but it is very exciting narrative isn't it might be better and the other thing i don't know i don't know if you normally have children's talks here do you normally have children's talks in church on a Sunday morning but we in Australia generally have a children's talk and then the sermon on the same subject the children's talk gives you the opportunity of saying to the children what you're going to say later on in a more adult way to the adults but i reckon the adults love the way you say it to the children because we're all just grown up kids and so generally to the children you'll always use something visual you'll never do that generally in the pulpit but the children's talk gives you the opportunity of doing that.

and i think training your people to read is really important that Clifford Warn book on how to read the bible and how to hold the audience without a rope they're great books on just training people to read the bible okay anything else yes yes yeah because i noticed that sometimes this gives us you know quite a lot of detail writing Steven's speech or the sermon of Antioch yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah no i i think he i think he's really interested in the sermon itself to show you the sorts of approach they took so that the way they preach to Jews and Gentiles and so we can see that hey it is important to be culturally relevant how they started for example i think my favorite sermon of all in Acts is Act 17 where Paul goes to the Athenians and he immediately comes on the scene and he says hey i noticed on the way here uh... the altar to the unknown god and i'm going to tell you about him and then he quotes their poets to them but at Pisidian Antioch he's always quoting the Old Testament scriptures and i think therefore he's showing he's not disinterested in the sermons he's very interested in them but he's sort of providing them for us a model for us of communicating across a culture here it is i think that's what he's doing isn't he also they're also showing showing that Peter and Paul proves the same gospel as Peter yeah yeah that's right and there's very close parallels of Jesus Peter and Paul right i've got five minutes and i'm not going to waste them okay so uh... so i'm now going to move on to pastoral implications of preaching Acts all right so i'm just and i

think this is over the page because i know that i'm going to need every minute um... first of all the first pastoral implication i would say is that we need to be thanks man uh... certainty luke 1 4 uh... luke writes in order that theophilus may have certainty now i think therefore that it's important that if you if you if you deal with people who doubt and in our parish i think i'm dealing a lot with people who doubt very often our parish is a very university parish and when they come to church when we where we go on sunday i think the doubt always is a result of unrealistic expectations if you look at the doubt of john the baptist go and ask him according to matthew is he the one or should be looking for someone else remember john the baptist said go and ask jesus is he the one when john was in prison or should we be looking for someone else what caused john the baptist to doubt that jesus was the one because jesus was not being the messiah that john expected him to be doubt therefore always springs from unreal expectations now what i think is wonderful about this for those of us who are in ministry is that luke paints a picture for us here that ministry is not going to be easy they don't go into ministry and think that it's going to be an easy ride it will not be there is no false triumphalism here in the book of acts life will not be easy and ministry will not be easy if you just look at the book of acts chapters 1 to 28 one third of the narrative from chapter 21 to 28 is all about paul's trials stoning imprisonments whipping courts tribunals shipwreck snakebite now why is luke giving us

one third of his narrative to the difficulties which the gospel bearer carries because we will carry them now just have a look at chapter 14 verse 22 i think it's an amazing section look at verse 19 of chapter 14 you remember they've been through lystra and derby then some jews came from antioch and iconium and won the crowd over they stoned paul and dragged them outside the city thinking he was dead but after the disciples had gathered around him he got up and went back into the city the next day he and barnabas left for derby now you're all i'm a wimp aren't i'm going to bed last night i got this sore back you know yeah how are you this morning i'm much better my back's better look at this they stoned him and left him for dead he didn't slip a disc in his back he gets up having been left for dead and goes back into the city isn't that remarkable it's just amazing to me but we very quickly read over that they stoned him and left him for dead but he was out of bed and he was straight into it again it's remarkable they preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples they returned to lystra iconium antioch strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith now listen to this they strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to remain true to the faith we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of god they said now i reckon our students at home are about to graduate from college and if i said to them i've got a real encouraging word for you and the word is that you're going to go in ministry and it's going to be a really productive time god bless you oh we're so encouraged by that come and i'll give you a really encouraging word it's going to be really tough out there it's going to be hard and that is exactly what paul says no false expectations you go out there knowing that it is through hardship substantial difficulties that's the idea that we must enter the kingdom of god it's not easy life is not easy we had a prime minister once who when the economic forecast turned out pretty bad he said well life wasn't meant to be easy we never re-elected him how dare he speak realistically to us we can't take it we never re-elected him it's amazing isn't it look here doubt is built on unreal expectations unreal expectations everything will be terrific ministry will be wonderful it's tough but you won't lack support there is comfort and there is security but it will be tough because god will watch over you and he will see his purpose as being fulfilled so that's the first issue I would deal with certainty and just the realistic emphasis of the book of Acts I tell you our daughter and son-in-law are missionaries in Mongolia in 1992 Mongolia opened it came out from the USSR and it became an open religious society there were three known believers in Mongolia today there are over 20,000 believers churches springing up everywhere what is the greatest threat to the church in Mongolia it is people like you people like me who come in from the west it's a great threat my son Dave my son-in-law Dave who's just the loveliest bloke says you don't know what it's like to sit in the congregation and get someone else from Australia or America or the UK they come in and they tell the people here that they can be healthy and wealthy just follow Christ and then they fly off on Monday morning and the Mongolians were trained don't trust anyone because you do not know who is a spy and who is not under the old communist system and now as Christians their big question is can we trust God and some preacher comes in and says this is what God promises you and they think can we trust God for wealth can we trust him for health and then they're gone and they leave people in tatters and we've got to pick up the pieces that the promise of the preacher is not necessarily the promise of God

[ 86 : 17 ] God is entirely trustworthy now what I love about the book of Acts is that it tells me what life is going to be like for the gospel bearer there will be ultimate triumph but it will be through many hardships stoning shipwreck snakebite whatever along the way but keep going keep pressing out because we have been empowered by God's spirit to do so let's pray we thank you our loving father for the forgiveness of our sins and for the gift of your Holy Spirit we thank you for our Lord Jesus and all that he's done and we thank you for calling us to this ministry of broadcasting the gospel from Jerusalem Samaria and to the ends of the earth we pray heavenly father for the fulfillment of your purposes and then for the return of Christ and we pray in his name Amen Amen Amen Thank you.