

The Gospel Goes Viral

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Preacher: Rev Angus Macrae

[0 : 00] I'm going to look to the Book of Acts tonight and to continue thinking about this message that Paul preached. The first sermon of the Apostle Paul during his ministry in the first of his three great missionary journeys that are recorded in the Book of Acts.

I mentioned this morning that he was in the company of Barnabas who came from the island of Crete. And when they visited that island together at the beginning of this missionary journey sent out from Antioch in Syria, I suppose the leading apostle was Barnabas.

But after leaving the island and going to the mainland of Asia Minor and going to Pisidian Antioch, they came to see Paul becoming the main spokesman of the mission.

He became the more gifted of the two and the more used by the Lord to spread the message that would one day win the whole world.

The first missionary journey covers Acts chapter 13 and 14. The narrative begins in Antioch in Syria. It ends in Antioch in Syria with a report back to the sending church.

[1 : 26] And all of that took around about a year and a half, under two years of traveling around 18 to 24 months.

And they visited the islands of the Mediterranean and they visited cities like Perga, this city where this sermon was in Antioch, in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

The message was one of hope. It was full of the resurrection. Just to stand back from this particular chapter, this particular passage that we're going to look at tonight, just to remind you of what Acts is in the Word of God.

John Piper has helpfully commented that Acts is fairly unique in the Scriptures. It's a book that's in the canon of Scripture to help prevent the church from coasting to a standstill.

It's really easy for that to happen to the Christian church, especially if things are going quite well or if there are decent numbers or there's plenty money around or something like that.

[2 : 39] We can simply think maintenance is all that we need. We'll just keep going, keep the wheels turning, but to complete Piper's quote, to prevent the church from coasting to a standstill and entering a maintenance mode with all the inner wheels turning, working, but going nowhere.

There have been many moments in the history of the global church where a particular local expression of the Christian faith starts to coast, to plateau and to decline or comes under the judgment of the Lord.

And I'm pretty convinced that the book of Acts contains the answer to avoid that danger. This book is saturated in prayer and in the fear of the Lord and it is driven by the heartbeat of a missionary concern.

Wanting to see outsiders becoming insiders, wanting to see people who are far away being brought near. If we lose that prayerful concern and that missionary concern, we're not really walking in the footsteps of the apostles.

We're not really living like a book of Acts kind of church. And yet the book of Acts is there in the New Testament to say, this is what life looks like between the first and second comings of Jesus.

[4 : 12] We want to see witness from Jerusalem in ever expanding circles of effect, like ripples in a pond.

You throw a stone in a pond and the ripples travel to the other side of the pond. If you stand by a loch or something like that, you've probably all done this.

You've thrown a stone and you see the little wave that it creates. Well, the death and the resurrection of Jesus are a moment at the center of the history of the universe, sending out ripples.

And depending on how we hear that story and respond to it, we will either be drawing nearer or drawing further away from life and hope and peace with God.

The church was born in Pisidian Antioch over the course of eight days of ministry. Two Sabbaths, two Jewish Sabbaths.

[5 : 23] Paul and Barnabas witnessing to a little group there. And on the eighth day, they were thrown out and they had to flee. But eight days was long enough to establish a living church that continued in that place and that continued to glorify God for years and years and years to come.

This book of Acts is full of fuel for our prayers and wisdom. If we want strategies, if we want an idea of who we should be and what we should be doing, we don't need to look any further.

Title for my message tonight is the gospel goes viral. It spreads like a contagion. You see these things sometimes in the news or on social media or something like that, that a story will be ignored for a long time and then suddenly everyone's talking about it.

It's mentioned, it's discussed, it's gossiped, it spreads all around the world. And Jesus and his death and resurrection becomes the talking point in Pisidian Antioch.

The church is born and the church grows. Two things about how this message came and about how it was reacted to tonight.

[6 : 58] The first thing is that there is good news for those who break God's law. The gospel, by definition, is good news.

And the gospel is to be shared with those who are in the wrong before Almighty God. The gospel is for sinners.

The gospel exposes the fact that we are sinners in need of Christ, in need of grace. The reason I broke the reading this morning at verse 37 and took it up again tonight at verse 38 is that Paul seems here to be moving to application mode.

He gives us his teaching, his doctrine, in his sermon, lots of Old Testament quotation in the verses recorded between 13 and 37.

But from verse 38 onwards, he's really bringing the plane down to land with his listeners in that synagogue. He's giving them the application.

[8 : 06] So what? What should you do with this message of Jesus who's been raised? And so he says in verse 38, Let it be known to you therefore.

I want you to take this on board. I want you to know this, understand it and act upon it, brothers. That through this man, through Jesus, what do you get through Jesus?

What is the good news of Jesus? It is that forgiveness is preached, is offered. Forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and by him.

Everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. He was speaking to Jews.

He was speaking to people who were scrupulous in their Sabbath observance. They went to the synagogue. They did the things that Jewish people were supposed to do according to the law of Moses.

[9 : 07] They would be circumcising their little boys. They would be thinking about how they paid into the costs of the temple back in Jerusalem. They would be thinking about the year and how at different stages in the year they obeyed the requirements of the law.

Their home life, even their kitchen, would be governed by the law of Moses. And Paul says that's fine as far as it goes.

But it does not free you from sin. The law of Moses actually teaches you how bad your problem of sin is.

The moral law applies to all human beings. The Ten Commandments. It applies to me. It applies to you. It doesn't matter in what era of world history we live.

It doesn't matter if we live in the Old Covenant or the New Covenant. It doesn't matter if we're young or old. The same Ten Commandments are binding on me, binding on my heart, binding on you.

[10 : 16] And no amount of temple visiting or synagogue visiting or attempts at keeping the law can fix you.

Because every one of those Ten Commandments has been broken by every human being who ever lived except one. Only Jesus kept this law.

Only Jesus pleased God at all times. And this problem that we have sinned and we have offended against God, we're in a deep hole and we are digging it even more deeply.

We cannot climb out of the hole. Jesus is the good news of forgiveness. I want to put it to you that if you have religion without a living faith in Jesus, you are trying to solve a guilt and shame and sin problem with something that will let you down.

Religion isn't going to cut it. Even versions that are Christianized of religion are just so much self-help.

[11 : 28] I was talking to a lad not so many days ago who grew up as a Jehovah's Witness. And in his early 20s he has turned his back on all of that and he has embraced Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

And as far as I can see, a true and growing Christian disciple. And he talked about what it was like to be a boy in that particular sect.

That they would do the mission things that they were told they had to do. To be on side with God. To be on side with the Kingdom Hall.

They would have to visit people or give out literature or approach doors. But they would do it as slowly as possible. It was usually a Saturday morning that he was involved in that as a boy.

As slowly as possible. Not like Paul wanting the whole city to hear of Jesus. Not like someone with the joy of salvation that wants everyone to know.

[12 : 41] But getting off with as little as possible. Because it's a drudge. It's a trial. It's not a joy. It's not a pleasure.

It's just ticking a box. My religion requires me to do this so I'll try and do it. But my heart isn't in it. And I suspect if we talk to religious people.

Whether they follow non-Christian paths. Or versions of Christianity that don't have Christ and the cross at the center. It's just a burden.

We're trying to carry something. Paul quotes the book of Habakkuk to his listeners in the synagogue. And he warns them.

He talks about freedom from these burdens. Freedom from the law of Moses that they couldn't keep by themselves through Christ and his resurrection. But in verse 40.

- [13 : 43] Beware therefore lest what is said and the prophet should come about. Look you scoffers. Be astounded and perish for I am doing a work in your days. A work that you will not believe even if one tells it to you.

Now the background to that was that Habakkuk had a message of invasion. Of the Babylonians coming to judge the nation. Because they were just going through the motions.

They were just religious. There was violence and there was destruction and strife and conflict. They weren't really repenting of these real sins. They weren't addressing the root problem of the human heart.

And so Habakkuk says in Habakkuk 1.4 Therefore the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. That's why you scoff.

That's why you don't believe. Even though someone explains it to you. You won't believe it. Because you don't deal with the root of your sin problem. Well here's good news for a world with a sin problem.

- [14 : 51] Here's good news for a world that cannot climb its way up to God by itself. God has come down.

God has come into the pit and the miry clay where we are. God has come down in Jesus Christ. And God has come under the load that we cannot carry.

And God has saved us through the cross and through the resurrection. And all that we need to do is repent and believe and put our trust in Jesus.

Now those who opposed Paul and Barnabas in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. They shook the dust off their feet when they left that city. They were rejecting Jesus and his death and resurrection.

And that meant they were condemning themselves. And just as Jesus told his church to do in Matthew 10 and Mark 6 and Luke 9 and Luke 10.

- [15 : 52] Jesus said if they won't receive my peace and my word. Shake the dust off your feet and go to the next town. And go to the next town. And go to the next town.

So that folk have the opportunity to hear the good news. There is a way for lawbreakers to be saved. But it's not through human effort.

It's not through human religion. It's through faith. That's all very well, isn't it? But I suspect the easy thing to do is to just nod and say, Yeah, I've heard that since I was a child.

I think that's right. And not ask the question, Am I doing this very thing that Jesus warned his compatriots in Israel about?

That Paul was warning the people in the synagogue about? Am I doing this? Are you doing this? That we think, My problem with sin and my problem with the things that I don't get quite right, It's quite a small problem.

- [17 : 01] It's one I'm going to somehow muddle through and fix. I don't really need God to come down and dramatically save me.

I don't need the Son of God to take my load. I'm better than a lot of other people. If there's a piece of your heart that thinks like that, Talk to God about it and admit that that is a grievous deception and a foolish sin.

To minimize your need, to minimize your sin, to minimize your guilt. And maybe to say, I don't need the medicine that maybe some other people need.

We all need the medicine. We all need the gospel. We all need Christ. What Paul says in the synagogue on the second Sabbath when he was there, Is that he's going to turn to the Gentiles.

He's going to turn to the non-Jews. Because so many of the Jews are hardening their hearts against the message of the prophets. And the message of Jesus.

[18 : 14] And the message of the apostles. Not everybody. But some hardened their hearts. Be so careful that you don't go home tonight saying, I can listen to this gospel next week, next month, next year.

It's not important tonight. It is important tonight. If you have unconfessed, unforgiving sin in your life, It separates you from God and eternal life.

And I would not want to leave this building, let alone fall asleep at home tonight, Without crying out to God, Deal with my sin.

Give me eternal life. Be merciful to me. So there is good news for those who break God's law. And that's what the verses 38 to 41 are all about.

Don't be like those who are mentioned in the prophet Habakkuk's book, Who will not believe, Even if one tells it to you. But the second thing tonight, As well as the good news for those who break God's law, Is the right response to God's gospel.

[19 : 31] Verse 42 to the end of the chapter shows us those who responded correctly, And those who did not respond correctly. Verse 42, As they went out, Went out of the synagogue on the first of the two Sabbaths, The people begged them that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.

But they didn't wait till the next Sabbath. Verse 43, They haven't really left the vicinity of the gathering in the events in verse 43.

After the meeting of the synagogue broke up, Many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas. Isn't that interesting?

They heard the gospel, And some of them became convinced, There's something here that's real and necessary and true, And I want to find out more about it.

Maybe that's where you are in your life before God tonight. Well, they weren't happy to just say, Well, we'll see what happens. We'll see if we feel like coming along next week.

[20 : 34] They followed Paul and Barnabas. They wanted to know. Because it was a big deal to know God, To know peace with God. It was a big deal.

And so they spoke with Paul and Barnabas, And they urged them to continue in the grace of God. To continue in the way of peace with God through the cross.

Verse 44, So what has happened in Pisidian Antioch? The whole city wasn't in the Jewish synagogue on the first Sabbath.

Something has happened in that city Between one Friday and the next Friday. The Sabbath was Friday night, Saturday morning.

What happened between the synagogue service breaking up On the first Sabbath, And then the following week, seven days later.

[21 : 37] What happened to bring the whole city out? People were talking. The news of Jesus as the God who became a man, The God who as a man suffered and tasted death, The God who took shame onto himself, And suffered and died on the tree, On the cross, That was being talked about in Pisidian Antioch all week.

And the whole city came out to the synagogue To hear what was going on. That's why I say the good news of the gospel went viral.

People were talking about it. I can remember seasons in my own life Where this seemed to be happening And people were talking about the gospel And who's being converted And who's coming to church And who's reading the Bible And who's praying And who's coming to Bible studies And prayer meetings.

And sometimes that tide comes in And sometimes it goes out a bit And then it comes in again. But are you looking for that? Are you praying for that? Are you expecting that God can do again What he has done many times before?

Alistair Begg at a conference a while ago I heard him say the following words Talking about the local church And how important it is In God's work in the world.

[23 : 13] Alistair Begg said The authentic local church Contains the DNA Of a remade world.

I like that. Where you get a few people There might only be 20, 30, 50, 80, 100 There might be hundreds There might be thousands But if it's a real gospel church That gathers around the word Gathers around prayer Gathers around the sacraments There's something going on there That has got the seeds of a new creation in it.

It's got the DNA of a remade world. It's got the power To make a dead place come alive. I once came across a photograph Taken in Chile In the Atacama Desert Which is the driest desert on earth.

Some polar regions can be classed as deserts But outside of the poles The Atacama in Chile It's got mountains on one side That stops clouds bearing rain It's got the Pacific Ocean on the other side That takes the wind away from the land So that there's no chance of rain falling on the ground.

Very different from our dear Hebrides. It doesn't rain a lot in the Atacama Desert It's the driest place on earth. And yet In the 1970s It rained heavily there.

[25 : 01] And the thing that happened in that desert That surprised people And caused thousands of people To travel there With their cameras And take photos of the place Was that that dry wilderness That had had no recorded rain For maybe 300 years When the rain came It turned pink And purple With a bloom of flowers A floral bloom The seed was there And the life was in the seed Wherever God's word goes Wherever God's gospel goes It has the DNA Of the new creation Of the age that is to come Within it.

And that means If you are praying For your children For your spouse For your Sunday school group That you look after For your youth fellowship The seed has the life Of the kingdom in it And you are praying That God would water it And cause it to come alive A super bloom When dormant seeds Burst into life That is glorious and wonderful When the word comes in power Now there is resistance In verse 45 When the Jews saw the crowds They were filled with jealousy Pure envy Don't like to see The success Of the Christian missionaries And so they began to contradict What was spoken by Paul Reviling him And Paul and Barnabas Don't shut up They speak with boldness It is necessary

That the word of God Be spoken first to you Since you thrust it aside Judge for yourselves Since you judge yourselves Unworthy of eternal life We are turning to the Gentiles This is fulfilling prophecy actually This is the role of the Messiah And the role of the witnesses Of the Messiah I have made you a light For the Gentiles That you may bring salvation To the ends of the earth And the Gentiles rejoiced And the word of the Lord Was blessed to them And many believed And the word of the Lord Spread through the region Verse 49 And despite the opposition They are filled with joy And with the Holy Spirit There is a bloom There are flowers There is life The word of God was honoured The word of God was shared And God's sovereignty Is at work in all of this And a little bit of persecution Didn't halt the power of the word A bit of hassle Didn't halt the power of the word

What about the islands? What about Stornoway? What about our schools? What about our community? What about people With deep, deep hatred Towards the things of Christ?

They may be being burnt They may be had a bad experience They may be being let down badly By a Christian Or by a church And they don't want to touch This Christianity With a long, long, long barge pole While prayer And love And gentleness And the word Can get through Because the seed Has life in it The word Has life in it I want to finish By giving you three signs Of a healthy response To the gospel I think this will be true At all times And in all places That where God is working These three signs Will mark God working And God's word getting through And these three signs Are a hunger for the words And an active witness

[29 : 13] And an overcoming Of opposition Through grace Hunger for the word Active witness Overcoming Opposition There is hunger All through this chapter And indeed all through Many parts of the book of Acts There is hunger for the word Paul's sermon Quotes Psalm 2 Psalm 16 Isaiah 55 Isaiah 49 Habakkuk chapter 1 It's full of the word Paul is a word of God Man And God's grace Is falling On the word If you find it hard to pray Read through A psalm And ask God to help you To turn that psalm Into your stumbling Halting prayers It's the word That will disciple you And will help you To grow spiritually And to be fruitful Spiritually

I've hidden your word In my heart That I might not Sin against you A few chapters on In chapter 17 We read about The Bereans The people there In chapter 17 Verse 11 Received the message In Berea With great eagerness And examined the scriptures Every day To see if what Paul said Was true Many of them believed They searched the scriptures If you're not sure If you've got questions Search the scriptures It's a sign Of a healthy response To the gospel That we read And that we Carefully read The word of God The second sign Is active witness Again This passage Is full of it Verse 44 The next Sabbath Almost the whole city Gathered to hear The word of the Lord Verse 49 The word of the Lord Was spreading Throughout the whole Region I mentioned this morning

That a team Of three missionaries Had been reduced To a team Of two missionaries That did not stop The word spreading Mark John Mark Had left But the blessing Of God Had not left And so Barnabas And Paul See blessing And their witness And the witness Of others Makes the gospel Credible I know There is live stream And things like that And that sometimes We maybe think Well Do I really need To go out tonight Nobody will miss me And I can always Catch up with the service Or I can watch it live And that's true But if you walk Into a building And there are Hundreds of empty seats That could be filled It makes the word Less credible To any visitor Who comes in Off the street And I think

This is something That has happened Across Europe In the last Centuries actually That many people Have concluded That Christianity Is irrelevant Because it doesn't Seem To affect People Doesn't seem To be precious To them Well the gatherings Of God's people Should be well Supported And the mission Of God's church Should be well Supported Prayerfully Financially And every other way To show That we really Do believe this And we do Love and serve This God And we want To be committed And it may be That there's a cup Final on the TV It may be That we've had A hard week It may be That we have A lot of work To do In the next few days But if God Is great In our thinking We will not Be minimizing!

Our desire To honor him In active Witness Romans 1 Verse 16 For I am not Ashamed of the gospel I fear that Many Christians Seem to be ashamed I wonder how often I'm tongue tied And I'm ashamed But that gospel Is God's power For salvation For Jew For Gentile So when I meet People And they ask me What I do For a living When I meet people And they ask me What I did At the weekend Or what I did At New Year Or at Christmas I want to give them An answer That glorifies God Not to sort of Show off Or to Sort of You know Be a A kind of Pretend-y Holy person But to think How can I Answer this Casual question With a way

[34 : 17] That says I had a great Weekend I spent time With a family We ate together And we got to Go and worship Jesus Christ Together And that's the Highlight of our Week So important To us As a family Hunger for the Word An active Witness Matthew Henry Once said The spirit of Christ Is the spirit Mission Do you believe That If we have The spirit We have The spirit To equip us To be Missionaries To be Witnesses A hunger for the Word An active Witness And then Overcoming Opposition And I guess That sometimes Just looks like You keep Going Even when You're tired Or even When It's not Easy Verse 45

When the Jews saw The crowds They were Filled with Jealousy They began To contradict What was Spoken by Paul Reviling Him Reviling Is a Strong Word My Colleague Chris Davidson At Merkinj At the Church Plant In one Of the Poorest Parts Of the Highlands In one Of the Most Economically Deprived Postcodes In Scotland Chris Says And I Think he's Right If you Want to Be a Gospel Minister In Contemporary Scotland You need A heart That is Soft And gentle Like Jesus And you Need a Hide That is Tough Like a Rhinoceros It's not Going to Be easy It's not Going to Be easy To be A deacon Or an Elder It's Going to Cost You But we Are called As disciples To take Up the Cross It's not Going to Be easy If you Give up

A career That's A good Career To take The wage Of a Church Worker And go And spread The news Of Jesus But it's Worth it Don't do It For earthly Reward You overcome Difficulty Cost Opposition You keep Going Verse 50 The Jews Incited the Devout Woman of High Standing And the Leading Men of The city And stirred Up Persecution Is that Really What's Stopping Us Are we Being Persecuted Not Much Maybe Sometimes People Have a We Laugh At Our Expense But we're Not going To be Rounded Up And put In jail Are we But we Have brothers And sisters Who face That In Sudan And where Islam is Sweeping Through parts Of Africa And making

It so hard To be a Christian In parts Of India In parts Of Asia Hinduism And buddhism Can be very Militant Atheism Secular Can be Very Militant In your Workplace Maybe It's not Easy To take A Respectful Gentle Christian Stand But do It Commit Yourself To God And do It I don't Think we Will face The risk Of stoning Paul faced That in Chapter 14 And verse 19 Because the Jews from Antioch Travelled 80 miles To the Next town That he Was in And stirred Up trouble Against him And tried To have him Killed That's a Different order Of difficulty But he Overcame it By grace By faith Now what's

The worst Thing That's going To happen To us If we Look to The Lord And desire To respond To the Gospel As a Christian Who wants To be a Witness To be a Sin What's What's The worst That will Happen To you If you Are ready To follow Jesus But you're Thinking Some of My friends Will tease Me Tease you Isn't it Worth it That the Son of God Hung Naked On a Tree And died For you Isn't it Worth it That you Might be Teased By someone Nail your Colors To the Mast Follow Jesus He's Worth it Overcome Opposition I'm just Amazed By this Chapter That there Were Eight Days That Paul And Barnabas Spent in That city But when

[39 : 21] They left It They left A church Free Church of Scotland Has been Around Since 1843 We're Heading For another Big Anniversary 2043 Will have Been Around For two Centuries I fear That we Are not As tough As Paul And his Companions Were That we Give up Too Quickly That we Quit Too Easily And so I encourage You to Find your Strength And find Your joy And find Your encouragement In the Gospel The good News For those Who break God's law Come to The cross And the Good news That all Who come With the Right Response To the Gospel Will be Saved And will Then have News to Share There is

Encouragement Here I wonder If Scotland Is a dry Spiritual Desert More arid Than the Atacama I wonder If prayer And fasting Are needed So that the Rain begins And the Seed Comes alive Father In heaven We bless You for Being together Under the Word today For being Together under The Word This evening And for The pictures That we Have of The growth Of the Early Church Despite Persecution There was Response!

There was Harvest Grant Harvest And response Tonight And in Our hearts And in This gathering And in The weeks And the Months And in The years To come Bless Your servant Callum Smith As he Ministers Here And all Who are Part of The team Here And all Who preach Here regularly In English And Gaelic Bless the Coming weekend And the Visit of Colin Macleod Next Sunday And bless The work And the Witness Of all Who serve You Across This land Of ours Bless every Gospel Church And grant That the Arid Days The dry Days The wilderness Desert Days Will be Replaced With super Bloom With life With glory With many Many Stories Of salvation Hear our Prayers Amen Shall we

Close With the Lovely Words Of psalm 84 From the Scottish Psalter Psalm 84 We'll Sing From the Beginning Of the Psalm In the Scottish Psalter Psalm 84 How Lovely Is thy Dwelling Place O Lord Of hosts To me The Tabernacles Of thy Grace How Pleasant Lord They Be We'll Sing Verse 1 And 2 And then We'll go Down to Verse 8 Lord God Of hosts My Prayer Here The First Two Verses And the Final Four Stanzas Of Psalm 84 To God's Glory The Tune Is The Homes Of Donegal Paul How lovely is thy place, O Lord, of hosts to thee.

The tavern outcomes of thy gifts have blessed longed me.

[43 : 13] My thirsty soul of timidly, yet face thy horns to see.

My heavy heart and flesh I urge, O living not for thee.

Lord God, of hosts my prayer here, O Jacob's gardener.

He guard her shield, look on the face of thine and ironed deal.

For in thy courts on me excels a thousand rather than.

[44 : 11] My thoughts I dwell like deep and warm, and dwell in tents of sin.

What of the Lord's house sun and shield, give peace and glory there.

And dwell with hope no good on end, and other need to live.

O thou that art the Lord of hosts, and man is to thee blessed.

With my assured confidence, on thee alone thou best.

[45 : 10] Receive God's blessing. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, be upon you, and on the whole Israel of God, today and forevermore.

Amen. Go in peace. Thank you.