

November 15, 2020

NORTH METRO CHURCH

NMC SERMON SERIES CONTENT



“Pivot: A study in the book of Acts” SERIES OVERVIEW:

Everything in our lives seems to be changing these days and every change is causing us to pivot in a new direction. As we look into the book of Acts, we will see how the early church was formed, grew, and learned to pivot as God led them to new people and places. In this series, we'll be reminded that the same God who was with the early church at every pivot is also still with us.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Author: The book of Acts, also called Acts of the Apostles, does not specifically identify its author. From Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1–3, we know that the same author wrote both Luke and Acts. The tradition from the earliest days of the church has been that Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, wrote the books of Luke and Acts (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11).

Date of Writing: The book of Acts was likely written between AD 61 and 64.

Purpose of Writing: The book of Acts was written to provide a history of the early church. The emphasis of the book is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Acts records the apostles being Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding world. The book of Acts sheds light on the gift of the Holy Spirit, who empowers, guides, teaches, and serves as our Counselor. Reading the book of Acts, we are enlightened and encouraged by the power of the gospel as it spread throughout the world and transformed lives. Many miracles were performed during this time by the apostles to validate their message. The book of Acts covers the transitional time between the ascension of Christ and the completion of the New Testament canon, and the apostolic miracles were God's means of authenticating His message through the men who penned the Bible.

Key Verses:

Acts 1:8: "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."

Acts 2:4: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Acts 4:19–20: "But 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.'"

Acts 9:3–6: "As [Saul] neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'"

Acts 16:31: "So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.'"

Brief Summary: The book of Acts gives the history of the Christian church and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as the mounting opposition to it. Although many faithful servants were used to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, Saul, also called Paul, was the most influential. Before he was converted, Paul zealously persecuted Christians. Paul's dramatic conversion on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1–31) is a highlight of the book of Acts. After his conversion he went to the opposite extreme of loving God and preaching His Word with power and fervency in the Spirit of the true and living God. The disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses in Jerusalem (Acts 1—8:3), in Judea and Samaria (8:4—12:25), and to the ends of the earth (13:1—28:31). Included in the last section are Paul's three missionary journeys (13:1—21:16), his trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea (21:17—26:32) and his journey to Rome (27:1—28:31).

Connections: The book of Acts serves as a transition from the Old Covenant to the New. This transition is seen in several key events in Acts. First, there was a change in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose primary function in the Old Testament was the external "anointing" of God's people, among them Moses (Numbers 11:17), Othniel (Judges 3:8–10), Gideon

(Judges 6:34), and Saul (1 Samuel 10:6–10). After the ascension of Jesus, the Spirit came to live in the very hearts of believers (Romans 8:9–11; 1 Corinthians 3:16), guiding and empowering them from within. The indwelling Spirit is the gift of God to those who come to Him in faith.

Paul's conversion in Acts 9 is a dramatic example of the power of God unto salvation (see Romans 1:16) and the opening of spiritually blinded eyes. Paul admitted that, prior to meeting the risen Savior, he was the most zealous of Israelites and was blameless "concerning righteousness based on the law" (Philippians 3:6), going so far as to persecute those who taught salvation by grace through faith in Christ. But, after his conversion, Paul realized that all his legalistic efforts were worthless, and he considered them "rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (Philippians 3:8–9). Before he met Christ, Paul had been blinded by a pharisaical misinterpretation of the law and an inflated opinion of his own righteousness. After he met Christ, the "scales fell from Saul's eyes," as it were (Acts 9:18). His boasting of his own goodness was replaced by his glorying in the cross of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:27; Galatians 6:14).

Peter's vision of the sheet full of unclean animals in Acts 10:9–15 is another sign of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant's unity of Jew and Gentile in one universal Church. The "unclean" animals in Peter's vision symbolized the Gentiles, who were declared "cleansed" by God through the sacrificial death of Christ. The Old Covenant law had served its purpose (see Galatians 3:23–29), and both Jews and Gentiles are united in the New Covenant of grace through their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Practical Application: God can do amazing things through ordinary people when He empowers them through His Spirit. The book of Acts shows how God essentially took a group of fisherman and commoners and used them to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). God took a Christian-hating murderer and transformed him into history's greatest Christian evangelist, the author of almost half the books of the New Testament. God used the persecution the Christians endured to help stimulate the incredibly rapid expansion of the fledgling church. God can and does do the same through us—changing our hearts, empowering us by the Holy Spirit, and giving us a passion to spread the good news of salvation through Christ. If we try to accomplish God's work in the world in our own power, we will fail. Like the disciples in Acts 2, we must faithfully proclaim the gospel, trust God for the results, and devote ourselves "to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

Taken from:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Acts.html>

Video Overviews of the book of Acts:

Acts 1-12

<https://youtu.be/CGbNw855ksw>

Acts 13-28

<https://youtu.be/Z-17KxpjL0Q>

"PIVOT" WEEK 15



Discussion Questions:

When was the last time you found yourself in a situation with people on a place that you normally wouldn't go? What happened? Why are you there?

When have you experienced a culturally diverse worship service? What did you appreciate about it?

Read Acts 10:1-16.

Besides pork, there was a whole range of meat, which Jews were forbidden to eat (see Leviticus 11). These food laws serve to mark out the Jewish people from their non-Jewish neighbors, a rule reinforced by the prohibition of Jews eating with non-Jews. All of this we must keep in mind as we join Peter on the roof and watch this great sail descending from heaven with unclean food in it.

If you were Peter, what kind of emotions would you be experiencing during the vision?

The Jewish laws including the food laws were something that God had fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 5:17-20). While these laws were God-given, it's not unusual for Christians to have man-made rules and regulations that prevent us from reaching out to people different than us. What are some that come to mind? Why do we abide by them? Have you ever experienced criticism for going against them?

Why was divine intervention necessary to bring Peter and Cornelius together?

God could have communicated the gospel to Cornelius directly. Why do you think he had Peter and several other believers travel from Joppa to Caesarea to meet with Cornelius and a house full of other people face-to-face?

Some believe the story suggest that all religions lead to God or even that all religions are basically the same. What evidence is there in this episode that neither Cornelius nor Peter would agree with such a viewpoint?

What truth was Peter beginning to grasp when he remarked that God shows no partiality (10:34)?

Read Acts 11:1-18.

What evidence or lines of argument did Peter used to calm his Jewish brothers who were alarmed and outraged by the influx of Gentiles into the church (11:1-18)?

What differences divide believers today?

What issues do you think Christian should not fight over? What issues are worth discussing?

Read John 17:20-23. What did Jesus pray for in this passage? Why is a lack of unity harmful to the church?

How can believers remain unified when disagreements arise?

How can you help your Christian brothers and sisters focus on the common ground you share?

In the story, both Cornelius and Peter are responsive to the spiritual prompting in their life (10:5 & 10:19-20). Do you believe that God is at work in your life we you to connect with other people? Or are you not responding? Why? Does anyone in your group have example of godly need to connect with someone different than you? How did you know it was God leading you?

How is God leading you to cross racial or cultural barriers with the love of Christ? What are some specific actions you can take?

Looking back at this week's teaching and study, is there one thing you'd especially like to remember this week?