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April 2009

SUPERNATURAL ACTS OF GOD IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The full name of the book of Acts is "The Acts of the Apostles," but many have observed that it should be titled "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." Jesus said "I will build my church," and Acts tells the thrilling story of how the Lord began that great work. I want us to think about what God is saying to us through this little book.

The book of Acts was written by Luke, "the beloved physician" and companion of Paul in his travels. It was written about AD 62, so it covers a 30-year period starting from the resurrection of Christ. Luke introduces his first book as follows:

(Luke 1:1-4) *Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*

And the introduction to his second book:

(Acts 1:1-3) *The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

So Luke said that in his first book he was reporting what Jesus began to do and teach, and in his second book he was reporting what the risen Lord continued to do and teach through the Holy Spirit and through the church.

Now I want to draw attention specifically to the supernatural acts of God as reported in

Acts:

- Chapter 1:9-11 - Jesus ascended bodily into Heaven and two angels talked to the amazed disciples.
- Chapter 2:4-38 - The 120 disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit, with a mighty wind, tongues of fire, the gift of tongues, and the appearance of drunkenness.
- Chapter 3:6-10 - A lame man was instantly healed by Peter and John, "walking and leaping and praising God."
- Chapter 4:31 - After praying, the place "was shaken and they were all filled (again!) with the Holy Spirit."
- Chapter 5:1-11 - Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. Peter pronounced their judgment, and they dropped dead.

- Chapter 5:12 - "many signs and wonders were done."
- Chapter 5:16 - "a multitude...of sick people...and those tormented by unclean spirits...were all healed."
- Chapter 5:19 - "An angel...opened the prison doors and brought them out"
- Chapter 6:8 - "Stephen did great wonders and signs"
- Chapter 7:55 - Stephen saw Heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
- Chapter 8:5-7 - Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ, performed miracles, cast out spirits, and healed the paralyzed and lame.
- Chapter 8:26 - An angel spoke to Philip directing him.
- Chapter 8:39 - The spirit of the Lord caught Philip away.
- Chapter 9:3-9 - A light shone on Saul of Tarsus, he was stricken blind, the Lord spoke to him.
- Chapter 9:10-19 - Ananias received a vision, laid his hands on Saul, who was filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Chapter 9:33-34 - Peter heals a paralyzed man.
- Chapter 9:36-40 - Peter raises Dorcas from the dead.
- Chapter 10:3 - Cornelius is visited by an angel.
- Chapter 10:11 - Peter has a vision of a sheet let down from Heaven.
- Chapter 10:44 - The Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, who spoke with tongues.
- Chapter 11:28 - Agabus prophesies about a coming famine.
- Chapter 12:7 - An angel delivers Peter from prison.
- Chapter 13:11 - Paul speaks blindness onto a sorcerer.
- Chapter 14:8-10 - Paul heals a man lame from birth.
- Chapter 16:9 - Through a vision Paul is called to Macedonia.
- Chapter 16:16 - Paul casts a spirit out of a slave girl.
- Chapter 16:26 - Through an earthquake God delivers Paul and Silas from a dungeon.
- Chapter 18:9 - God speaks to Paul in a vision.
- Chapter 19:6 - Paul laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them, they spoke with tongues and prophesied.
- Chapter 19:11 - Unusual miracles by Paul, even his handkerchief caused people to be healed and demons to leave them.
- Chapter 20:9 - A young man fell three stories and was killed. Paul raised him from the dead.
- Chapter 20:28 - Paul speaks a prophecy.
- Chapter 21:11 - Agabus speaks a prophecy.
- Chapter 27:23 - An angel speaks to Paul during a terrible storm at sea.
- Chapter 28:3 - Paul is bitten by a snake but is unharmed.
- Chapter 28:8 - Paul heals a man of fever and dysentery.
- Chapter 28:9 - Paul heals all their diseases.

work in and through His people now! God has not changed. His heart is still toward the lost, oppressed,

sick, and suffering. He gave power and gifts to the church so that we could continue to go into all the world and make disciples, heal the sick, cast out demons, and set the prisoners free. In many places in the world, God is doing these works today. He is waiting on us to step out in faith and obedience so that He can do His work of building His church in our midst.

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"BUT I'M SO USELESS!"

Elijah was one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. He performed great miracles: controlling the weather, calling down fire from Heaven, raising the dead. But when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him, he ran away in fear and hid in a cave. He was filled with self-pity and complained that he was the only faithful man in all the nation of Israel. God said, "Oh, no, you're not! There are 7,000 faithful men and women in Israel who have never bowed their knees to Baal." (1 Kings 19:18)

Think about those 7,000 faithful people. Who were they? We don't know. This is the only mention of them in the Bible. Did they do any great things? We don't know. But we know a few things about them: They lived in a time of trials and tribulations beyond our experience. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel of Israel were slaughtering all the priests and prophets of God and were persecuting the godly people. They were building idols to Baal and demanding that people worship these demonic idols, which involved perversion and prostitution and the sacrifice of living children.

Most everyone in the nation gave up and gave in. The people hated what was going on, but they didn't have the courage to stand up to their wicked rulers, so they bowed down to the idol of Baal. But not everyone gave in. In fact, there were 7,000 people who refused to bow to Baal. Elijah didn't know who they were. Ahab and Jezebel certainly didn't know who they were. But God knew them. He saw their hearts and their lives. They loved God. They refused to worship Baal, even though their faithfulness could cost them their lives. Their names were written down in Heaven.

Over the years, I have heard countless Christians say something like the following: "I'm so useless as a Christian. I don't know what I am supposed to do. I don't know if there is some special calling on my life. I don't feel called to be a pastor or into full-time Christian service." (The idea is that pastors and "full-time" Christians are first-class Christians, and the rest of us are 2nd or 3rd class. By the way, if you are not called to be a full-time Christian, how much did you sign up for? One day a week? Two hours?)

Are you serious about your relationship with God? Are you trying to grow in intimacy and faithfulness to Him? Do you love your spouse and children, and do they know it or is it a

CONCLUSIONS

What does all this mean? These are some thoughts that come to me:

- (1) This little book by Luke is reporting what God thought was most significant in the first 30 years of the church. (God is the Author of the Bible.)
- (2) This is the beginning of the fulfillment of the Great Commission -
 - (a) First, the believers needed power (Acts 1 & 2 - Pentecost).
 - (b) Then they were to be witnesses to Christ "*In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and all the earth.*" This was exactly the pattern of Acts, concluding in Rome, the capital of the Gentle ruling nation.
- (3) The early Christians were passionate about the Lord. They spent much time in prayer, studying the Word, and fellowship.
- (4) The rapid growth of the church was not the result of some "program of evangelism," but was apparently the by-product of their love for God and people. Jesus gave the church the "Great Commission:" "Go into all the world and make disciples..." But notice in Acts how God directed everything and how central "signs and wonders" such as healings and words of knowledge were to the whole process.
- (5) Their faithfulness to Christ stirred up much hostility and persecution. They were hated by the religious leaders of their day, the Pharisees, and hated and murdered by the emperors of Rome: James was "slain with the sword;" Stephen was stoned to death; many were put in prison; their property was confiscated (Hebrews 11:25-40); Peter and Paul were beaten, imprisoned, and finally executed (not reported in Acts).
- (6) God loves people so much that He sent His Son to die for us (*God so loved the world...*). God's strategy is to use believers to accomplish His rescue plan: *As the Father sent me, so I am sending you* (John 20:21) *Go into all the world and make disciples* (Mt. 28:19). Frankly, when I look at the church, and especially at myself, this part of God's plan seems like a big mistake, but God certainly knows what He is doing. (I repent for any irreverence, but I am being honest.)
- (7) The work of reaching the lost is our work and is dependent on our faithfulness and obedience. But the work of reaching the lost is also and primarily God's work. God is a supernatural God, and His fingerprints are everywhere in the book of Acts: signs and wonders, visions, dreams, gifts of the Holy Spirit, healings, miracles, tongues, words of knowledge, prophecies, angelic visitations, earthquakes, casting out demons, resurrections.
- (8) Obviously the birth of the church was a very special time, but I believe that Acts is more than history, it is a pattern, a blueprint, illustrating how God wants to

secret? Are you demonstrating love and kindness to everyone, especially to the "little" people who lack power, money, and influence, such as waiters, clerks, laborers, immigrants, the homeless, and Republicans? When you notice that you have failed to live as a Christian, perhaps by falling into an attitude of self-importance, jealousy, lust, or hurtful words, are you quick to repent and ask God and others for forgiveness? Do you have a passionate love for the Lord burning in your heart, and is your highest ambition to grow in your knowledge and love for Him?

Let me assure you that if you can honestly answer yes to these questions, and especially to the last one, then you are not, repeat not, useless. God knows your name. He knows everything about you. You are His special treasure. Your name is written in Heaven. Hallelujah!

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MINISTRY

(1) at the Dream Center in Hollywood

The first stop on my ministry trip last month was at Clayton Gollither's ministry, Hope for Homeless Youth, at the Dream Center in Hollywood. Had a great time teaching and doing personal ministry to the young people and staff. These are people from their early teens to their 20's rescued off the streets, and the issues in their lives are complex, confusing, and painful beyond belief. Following are some notes from my counseling (picture yourself trying to minister to them):

- My father beat my mother all the time, and I was born 2 months early after he punched my mother in the stomach. My mother and father rejected and hated me and I grew up without any affection. My mother loved my little sister, so I was jealous and tried to suffocate her. My sister hated me, constantly lied about me, tried to get me beat up by a gang, tried to drown me. My mother locked me in a room with a port-a-potty for days on end. My father sexually abused me and my brothers and sisters. I was a cutter, tried to kill myself many times. My grandmother put witchcraft curses against me.
- I never knew my mother. I was told she was an alcoholic and tried to commit suicide. My step-mother was a witch and hated me. I was addicted to alcohol, cocaine and meth by the time I was 13. When I am in bed at night, I can feel demons crawling on me.
- My father was full of rage and exploded all the time. The two things he said to me all the time were: "Eat crap and die!" and "Go to hell!" He sexually abused me when I was little. My mother despised me and wouldn't have anything to do with me. I hated God for letting all this happen to me.
- My father sexually abused me when I was 8 years old. I was moved around from foster homes to group homes to juvenile homes. At 17 I got in a gang fight and 3 women held me down and slit my throat. When I

recuperated, I had my gang catch those women and hold them while I carved my initials in their faces. I had kids by 3 different men. Every man in my life has been violent and abusive. I met Jesus 2 years ago, and He has been changing my life.

- My mother was a Mormon and was into voodoo. I believe she planted an "egg" inside my body and it is trying to be born and control me. My father was in the mafia and was angry and violent. He murdered many people.
- My father raised and sold marijuana and wouldn't let me go to church. My step-mother hated me. I was abused by men from the time I was little. I was called ugly, stupid, worthless. I became a cutter. I tried to kill myself 15 or 20 times. At 13 my best friend died, and I have been visited at night by the "grim reaper." I have made promises to Satan. I know that God is trying to rescue me, and I want to know Him more than anything.

These young people were born with 3 strikes against them. What do they need? They need Jesus. But they need more than to be born again: they need love, discipline, structure, training, healing, and deliverance. These kids don't know what it is to be loved. They don't have self-discipline, They don't know how to act as a responsible adult because they have never seen it modeled. I know that my ministry can help these young people a little bit, but they need someone like Clayton and his staff who are laying down their lives to rescue them day after day, month after month, year after year.

(2) in Mexico

Spent 10 days in Mexico ministering with Pepe Quiroz: preached in 3 churches, recorded 8 video messages for use in their television and radio ministry. Fred Feller and Lynne Cumming flew down for the last 2 days, and flew with me to the Amazon.

(3) in Atalia, Brazil

Flew to Bogota, then to Leticia, Colombia, then on a motorboat to Atalia, Brazil. There has been flooding upstream, and the Amazon was higher than it has been in many years, which caused many villages and homes to flood. Because of the high water, our motorboat was able to cut across two huge loops in the river, and we were literally moving through the rain-forest. As our boat pushed through the thick vegetation and trees, bugs and spiders showered down into the boat, and I was hoping a tree snake would not fall into the boat. I hunkered down between Fred and Lynne so that at least one of us would be safe. The flood negatively impacted attendance at our seminar. Only about 200 people attended, and at great personal sacrifice. On the final night, a Sunday, I got to preach at the public crusade in the plaza. About 80 people came forward for salvation, and about 50 came for prayer for healing. We saw some wonderful healings. Demons manifested in several people and were cast out. (Don't mess with Jesus!) I was disappointed at the low attendance at the seminar, but I did leave 2,000 copies of my Spanish book on inner healing that Jaime Useche will distribute at future seminars. (Most of the people on the river speak Spanish as well as Portuguese.)



Church service in Mexico



Tanna & Serena, daughters of missionaries (who translated into Portuguese for us), and a lady with twins



Seminar in Atalia, Brazil



Lynne, Glenn and Fred — boating.



Soldiers with AK-47's checking us out for drugs

God Bless,

Glenn

Web-site: www.glennbrownministries.com

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry. If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions, you may send them to:
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