

# Vision Weekend // August 2013

## // Acts 1:1–8

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### Introduction/Acts 1:1–8:

I'm not sure what images come to mind when you hear the word "church," but it's probably a good ways off from how they understood it in the first century.

The church at its inception was, essentially, a **movement... a movement built around conviction** that Jesus had died as the only Savior for sinners and that he had risen from the dead proving he was who he said he was; that he was the rightful Lord of the earth and all people everywhere were now commanded to repent and invited to come home to him.

In the Greek NT, the word translated "church" is "**ekklesia**." The word in Greek, it means literally, "an assembly," or "a gathering" of people around an idea. In fact, if you break the word *ek-klessia* down, it comes from "ek" means "out of" and "kaleo" means "called out." **So think of an ekklesia as an assembly of people called out around an idea.**

But over the years, a terrible thing happened. People began to think of church as a *place* that you went to for religious services.

- Our English word "church" comes not from the Greek *ekklesia* but from the German word **kirche**, which meant "a sacred place where you gather for religious purposes."

That shift in thinking changed the fundamental way people related to the church. Throughout **the Dark and Middle Ages** people went to church; it was place you attended or an event you sat through, rather than as a movement you were part of.

- And so the **church became an institution** that essentially provided services for people and was controlled by powerful people who used it to serve their own interests.

**But then something awesome happened.** God raised up a group of people called the Reformers. One of the main ones for the English-speaking world was William Tyndale.

- Tyndale came to the conviction that **Christianity was essentially a movement**, and that if people were going to be devoted to the movement they had to understand the message, and so his life's work was to produce the first translation of the Bible into common English.
- And **every time he came to this word *ekklesia*** he translated it "congregation" instead of church, because he was trying to emphasize that the church was **not a place you went to, but a movement you belonged to.**
- Well, that infuriated church leaders because it undercut their authority. Eventually Tyndale was tried as a heretic, **hanged and burned** at the stake.
- During his trial, right before he died, he said, "*If God spares my life, ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than you do.*"
  - As he was being burned his last recorded words were, "**Lord, open the king of England's eyes.**" If you've got a copy of the King James Bible, you can see that God answered that prayer.

But this is what the church is. An assembly built around a movement. *(And I'm indebted to Andy Stanley for talked about some of that in a message I heard him preach recently.)<sup>1</sup>*

The **danger of the church in every age** is to cease being a movement and become instead a ministry that provides service to people, or, even worse, a place people simply attend.

- **Movements move.** And if you're part of the movement, you're moving.

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Stanley, "Big Church, pt 1," on Acts 2.

That's the question for us this weekend:

- Are we, **as a church**, just doing ministry, running an institution—or are we part of a movement?
- **For you:** is the church a place you attend, or is it a movement you are personally part of?

Let's go to the Scripture to see how this all started:

## Acts 1:6–8

Jesus had resurrected from the dead and gathered his disciples together on a hillside...

[6] And... they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" In other words, what is your next move?

[7] He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses... Witness was a term used in court: you testified about what you had seen. A witness's job is not really to *do* anything, but to tell people what's already been *done*.

...in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." [9] And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

[10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

This has got to be one of the strangest scenes, ever, doesn't it? He gives them the largest assignment you could ever imagine... and then, with hardly any explanation, or plan of action, he leaves.

- They are like, "Wait... what? The whole world?" As he is ascending, they are like, "Jesus, do you realize how big the whole world is?" Jesus is like, "*Yep. I can see it all from here. You don't even know how big the world is.*"

This is where it all began. 2000 years later, here we are—with more Christians on the planet than any other religious group, all stemming from a group of 12 fishermen, and carpenters, and tax collectors.

Two important things about movement...

## I. The Message Captured Their Hearts and Minds. *Has it captured yours?*

- Their conviction was that Jesus had died as a **substitute for sinners**.
  - He **wasn't another prophet** with another religious message; he was **God himself**, on a rescue operation to save us.
  - We **crucified him**, because we are a rebellious, traitor race of people, who would rather run our own lives than submit to God our Creator—but **in the universe's greatest irony**, our murder of him, his sacrificial death, was the payment God accepted for our sins if we would acknowledge that and receive it.
- They **believed that Jesus had risen from the dead**, and they believed that (some of them) *against their wills* (they didn't have any view of a Messiah who would die in weakness and be resurrected)... *but they believed it because they'd seen it with their own eyes. This proved to them beyond any doubt that he was who said he was.*
- The Apostles understood that if this were true, that this was the **greatest act of grace** ever imagined: God, the Creator, dying for his rebellious children.

- *And...* it was the **most important message** ever given, because it was our only hope of salvation.
  - If this were true, then, there weren't multiple ways to get to God.
  - If there **were other ways** of salvation, God would not have put his Son through the cross. When Jesus said in the Garden, "If there is any other way, let this cup pass from me," if there were other ways, why wouldn't God have said, "**There are other ways. Just be a good person and be sincere and God will accept you.**"
  - No, Jesus had said "**I am the way, the truth and the life...**" and the Apostles believed him!
  - Peter would summarize the Apostles' message in Acts 4:12 this way, "**Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**" And they would take that message all over the world.
- They had also seen in Jesus' death a God so beautiful and glorious that he was worth giving away their whole lives for—a God whose glory deserved (they believed) to be spread among all peoples of the earth.
  - They'd seen this God command the hurricanes, converse with angels, control demons, walk on water, heal lepers and raise the dead; **yet, in the hour that he most needed** access to those powers, he turned his back on them so that he could give his life as a sacrifice for their sin.
- And they said, "*You are a God that should be worshipped in all the world.*"
  - And **when they dragged these Apostles** in front of the Sanhedrin and told them that if they didn't shut up about Jesus they would kill them, he said, "Well, you got to do what you go to do but I have to remain faithful to our Savior."
  - Timothy from Egypt

- **Here's my question: Do you believe this testimony?** Has it captured you until you can't shut up about it, are willing to go anywhere with it, and to give up anything for it?
  - If not, you're **not part of the movement.**
  - **Movements move.** Are you moving with this message?
- And if you have been captured by this message, **you probably don't need a vision weekend** to get you off of your rear end and into the game.
  - *Can you really imagine the Apostles needing a vision weekend? "We're all dying out here... What's this for again?"*
- There is no such thing as someone who really believes the gospel and sits on the sidelines.
  - Over the years I've used this story, and I come back to it time and time again... BRIDGE OUT. **(New illustration)**

*The Apostles had been captured by the message... have you?*

## **II. The Apostles Yielded Themselves to the Leadership of the Spirit. Have You?**

Again, this had to be the strangest scene in the NT. After laying on them the Great Commission, he leaves. ***Never had a more important assignment been given to a less qualified group of people.***

But here's the clue. Go back to vs. 1:

**In the first book** (1<sup>st</sup> book? Luke. Luke-Acts is a 2-volume set by the same author), **O Theophilus** (*Who's that? A skeptic he's writing these books for*), **I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,** (Acts 1:1 ESV)

"Began" implies continuation. It's not that in the Gospel of Luke Jesus worked, and now in Acts the church works; but Jesus worked in his fleshly body in Luke and now through his body, the church in Acts. He has invited the church not to do it for him, but to join him as he does it through them.

- In **Acts 1:8** he tells them *wait* for the Holy Spirit. Some of the Apostles were type-A, and I'm sure they were like, "Wait?" People are dying! We've got to get organized! Write books! Do a leadership conference!" He's trying to show them this is not something they can do for him, but something he will do through them.
- In every chapter of Acts you'll get this sense that the Church is simply following the Spirit. He's the real mover. He's working in people over here. Moving these believers this direction. They simply yielded themselves to him!

### Have you yielded yourself to him?

- I've pointed out to you that the book of Acts has no real ending. Paul has gone to Rome to preach the gospel but he ends up in prison... is he going to win converts there? And then it just cuts off. Cliff-hanger.
- That's because the movement had just begun.
- The Spirit of God is moving *you* into people's lives to complete this Great Commission.

So, believer, I want you to read Jesus promise in verse 8 as a direct statement to you:

**[8] ...But you** (Insert your name in your mind right there, believer—in fact, every believer say their own name) **will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witness...**

Two ways I want to identify that the Spirit's power comes upon you:

1. ~~**Spiritual gifts.** Every believer has been given one. Things like hospitality; teaching; serving. I don't have time to go into all of them, but they are ways that other people experience the touch of Jesus through you.~~
  - ~~But they all have one point: propelling the mission of Jesus forward.~~
  - ~~A friend of mine illustrated that to his church this way...~~ **fire engine.**

- Do you know your spiritual gift, and have you embraced yours?
2. *The second thing the Spirit of God did for these believers, beyond given them spiritual gifts, is he **empowered each of them to testify.*** The Holy Spirit **does a lot of things** in Luke & Acts, but the main thing he does is fill people to preach. In fact, anytime you see someone filled with the Spirit, they proclaim the word of God to others.
    - **Filling of the Spirit here (heart) produces the Words of God here (mouth).**
      - **Luke 1:15**, John the Baptist, being filled with the Spirit, proclaims the coming of the Lord.
      - **Luke 1:41**, Elizabeth, being filled with the Spirit, proclaimed blessing over Mary.
      - **Luke 1:67**, Zechariah, being filled with the Spirit, prophesied about the coming glory of Jesus.
      - **Acts 2:4**, The Holy Spirit fills the Apostles at Pentecost and they begin to declare God's praises in multiple languages.
      - **Acts 4:8**, Peter is filled with the Spirit and preaches to the rulers that Jesus is their only hope of salvation.
      - **Acts 4:31**, the disciples are filled with the Spirit and they speak the word of God boldly in the face of severe persecution.
      - **Acts 9:20**, Paul is filled with the Spirit, and he immediately begins to preach in the synagogues.
      - **Is this you? Do you regularly proclaim God's word to others, and bring them to Jesus?**

### Excuses:

- **"I don't have what it takes."**
  - Yes, you do, you have the Spirit of God.
  - Peter's sermon in Acts 2: sons and daughters shall prophesy. Prophets were rare—now it's everyone! *That which was reserved for heroes in the Old Testament is the privilege and responsibility of all believers today!*

- Rupert, 2 convictions of the effective witness: 1. the Spirit of God is constantly at work around you preparing people; 2. the Spirit of God uses you to speak the word of God. That's it!
- How hard is it? (Bridge; fireman)
- ***"It's not my gift."***
  - Yes, there are a few people with a special ability in it, but it is the responsibility of all believers.
- ***"I witness with my life."***
  - How do you do that? The gospel is not a good example about you do, but a message about what Jesus has done.
  - Trying to watch a newscast with the sound turned down.
  - Francis of Assisi.
- ***"I don't have time."***
  - "I get up, drink coffee, go to work... come home, try to play with my kids, watch a little TV, go to bed."  
**Wash/rinse/repeat.**
  - I like what Daniel Simmons, our NRC pastor says: "Oh, you're busy. Well, Jesus was busy, too. **But he was busy with people.**"
  - "As you go." "Evangelism is doing normal life with gospel intentionality."
  - Once heard a lady saying she didn't have time to do ministry at her church because she had to take her kids to soccer practice. Why not think of soccer practice as ministry? Lots of lost people there!
  - Why we don't overschedule you
- ***"Talking to other people about Jesus makes me feel weird."***
  - Of course it does. I've heard evangelism defined as "two nervous people talking to each other."
- But here's the thing: is the message important enough to be worth a little weirdness.
- To be honest, I am looking forward to hearing some of you explain to Stephen, or Paul, about why you didn't share Christ because you felt weird. "Oh, well, I got stoned."
- Evangelism is always uncomfortable, but it's worth it.
- It's worth rethinking your career; where you live.
  - Scott... needed; irreplaceable.
- Once all the excuses have been brought forward, here's the question the question that remains: *Do you really want to bring other people to Jesus?*
  - If you did, you'd figure it out. You'd be like the guy on the bridge.
  - They say necessity is the mother of invention. That's true in evangelism, too.
  - It's not a technique problem; it's a **belief problem** and an **apathy problem**.

### **Spurgeon:**

*"If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself; you will be whispering it into your child's ear; you will be telling it to your husband; you will be earnestly imparting it to your friend; without the charms of eloquence you will be more than eloquent; your heart will speak, and your eyes will flash as you talk of his sweet love.*

***Every Christian here is either a missionary or an impostor. You either try to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ, or else you do not love him at all.***

*It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus and a totally silent tongue about him... If you really know Christ, you are like one that has found honey; you will call others to taste of its sweetness; you are like the beggar who has*

*discovered an endless supply of food: you must go tell the hungry crowd that you have found Jesus, and you are anxious that they should find him too.*

*Movements move. If you're not moving, have you really believed the message?*

These are the two core principles that started the movement: **1. Radical, deep-seated belief in the message; 2. yielding themselves to the Spirit who moved them.**

*In light of that, here's how I see our church:*

- We want to be a movement.
  - Why we are **willing to grow big**. Throughout history, when the church has been a movement, they have grown quite large! It was that way in Acts. 3000 saved and baptized in Peter's 1<sup>st</sup> sermon; another 5000 a few weeks later.
  - Nothing wrong with small churches. Many churches in Acts started out that way. But movements grow.
  - You say, "**I don't like large churches.**" Well, you probably wouldn't have liked the church in Acts, either. And, for that matter, you probably won't enjoy heaven
- **We want to empower and release you to follow the Spirit.**
  - 39 of 40 miracles. The greatest ministry in our church happens outside these walls, by *you*.
  - Old SB pastor. Not a cruise ship, a battleship. Aircraft carrier
- We **never want to become just a Christian ministry** that takes care of our own needs or a place people attend.
  - It's why we say: "**You are sent.**"
  - Why we push **small groups to multiply**. We know its more comfortable to just be with a few people and **stare at your navels**. But we believe God is like a **spiritual cyclone**: he never draws you in without pushing you back out.
- *Are you engaged? Are you moving?*

○ **Practical:** Nowhere is whether we get this better revealed than in how you pray.

- For most believers, the **main, and perhaps only, subject of their prayers is themselves**. You pray for you, a few family members, and a couple of sick people. That's it.
- If God had answered all your prayers from last year, the only person really to be benefited would be you.
  - You might **be married now**; maybe you wouldn't be married (if God could go back in time); you'd be at a **new job**.
- While I'm on this, the prayers most of us pray are **dumb anyway**. We're like...
  - "**God, be with us.**" I already promised you I will never leave or forsake you. So, ask me something else."
  - "**Give us traveling mercies.**" What the heck are those? Traveling mercies. I think God is probably like, "*Put on your seatbelt and drive the speed limit and stop texting when you drive. There's your traveling mercy.*"
  - "**God, help me with my test.**" "Great. Why don't you use the brain I gave to study and quit depending on me to transmogrify information into your lazy mind?"
  - "**Bless this food.**" He's like: "You're eating a 1/2 lb hamburger topped with 3 strips of bacon and onion straws. I can't bless that. Go get some broccoli—they got a pre-built-in blessing you don't even have to ask for."
- When you are following Jesus, your prayers become about the mission.
- *If God answered all the prayers you prayed last week, how many new people in the kingdom? That will show you where you are on all of this.*

**Specific challenges:**

- **Belong!**
  - Join the church. Go to Starting Point.
  - Be a part of a small group. **GroupLink...**
  - Small groups are the best way to begin to discover ministry and get into discipleship.
  - “My small group isn’t doing that!”
    - This weekend we challenged...
    - I’m calling them out in front of you.
    - Go to your small group leader and say, “What’s wrong with us?”
  - “I had a bad experience.”
    - Give us another shot. If we get it wrong again, you start your own small group and teach us how to do it right.
- Go ahead and **make plans to go on a mission trip.**
  - Triplink

### Conclusion:

**The church is a movement. Movements move!** If you’re not moving, have you really believed the message?

- **Complacency in the Christian life** always points to being **out of touch with the urgency** of the message **and blind to the glory** of Christ!
- **Engage** in the mission!

**Maybe you are not a Christian**, and you’re like: “This is what I don’t like about Christians...” Plotting about how to convert. This is the message has shaped everything for us. I’ve staked my eternity on it. I have to tell you!

- I would just tell you, take a look at him! What do you think of Jesus? What do you believe of his claims to be God and the only way of salvation?

Prayer

## Bullpen:

- The church was a movement around that conviction, and the **most important thing about movements** is that they, well, move.
- 
- You're not really *doing* anything; you're telling people about what has already been done.
- 
- Are you serving, both here and in the community?
- 
- I told you this a few weeks ago, but church is a terrible hobby... but if you know Jesus, it makes sense.
- - 
  - Jesus about John the Baptist: "the least in the kingdom of God is greater than him." (because you know Jesus, and can testify to Jesus).
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- The Romans crucified thousands of people; there are only 2 that you can name. Jesus. The other was, "Spartacus."
  - Spartacus was a Roman soldier who had been imprisoned and had been turned into a slave and gladiator, who eventually rebelled and led a slave uprising against Rome. Would be like Russell Crowe at the end of Gladiator had Joaquin Phoenix not killed him.
  - It really scared Rome so to make an example of him they crucified him and his followers in the most brutal way, 6000 crosses lining the highway leading out of Rome for miles, and told the story near and far so that others thinking the same thing would be warned never to attempt that.
- One of the biggest questions of history is, "How did Jesus' story get known?" The Romans who did it barely noticed. Jesus to them was a backwoods Jewish peasant.

- But we know about it because these Apostles recognized that what Jesus did was so important and who Jesus is is so glorious that it was worth more than their lives.

They didn't spread this message for power or privilege. Going to church in those days was not a way to be seen, be respectable make friends, or meet women. The opposite of those things.

But Jesus had explained to them that they should rejoice when he left, because then he would send the Holy Spirit to come and live within them.

- When Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene in the Garden after he had resurrected, she could see that he was going away and she grabbed ahold of him. And he said, "Don't cling to me. If I don't go away, I can't come back to live in you as the Holy Spirit." In other words, let go of my hand so I can fuse with your soul.
- Augustine: "You ascended before our eyes, and we turned back grieving... only to find you in our hearts."

Yes, this assignment that Jesus gave them was overwhelming. But he promised to stay and do it through them.

Look at this:

- Scope of that mission
  - All nations on earth.
  - The Spirit's plan is to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. You should get in on that. In your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

***I. The Spirit of God invites us to follow him in this movement***

***II. The Spirit of God has a plan for you***

- *Centrifugal.* If a movement, small groups grow to multiply!



- [9] And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.  
[10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11 ESV)
- **For everyone:** Story of William Carey being told to "sit down" because God would win the heathen when he wanted and the GC was only for the disciples. Would be good to look up Carey's exact reasoning to rebut that position because it could be exciting to relate.
- Most of the miracles in Acts happen house to house, by normal people in the streets
- We're not a cruise ship, or even a battle ship, but an aircraft carrier
- **The urgency of the Great Commission is a game changer.**
- We can't go on with life as normal... The sacrifice of Christ and the lostness of the world demand a different response
- Adoniram Judson's story, could retell that. Emphasizes gravity of the gospel and its urgency in the world.

The Spirit of God has come upon *you*... and you shall be my witnesses:

What is he upon you for?

- Telling what Jesus did. Not what he taught; what he did.
- That there is no other way.
- The Holy Spirit does a number of important things. He comforts... guides, gifts...

group of people organized around a confession: they are witnesses. Not a place, but a movement.