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Introduction

A Church That Shines covers the first 12 chapters of Acts and is Part 1 of a 2-part study of the book of Acts. This study takes us back to the beginning principles and reminds us of the power behind the early church. As early Christians lived out their newly-found faith, the people around them were impressed. The phenomenal growth of the New Testament church can still be ours today if we are willing to shine in the world as they did.

God is still very concerned about the lost. He still intends to use Christians to reach out into a lost world. Salvation is a gift that we are to pass on to others. The light of Christ in us must continue to shine outward for others to find the way to God. They changed their world in one generation. We can do the same if we determine to be *a church that shines!*

About the Author

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Tell Me the Story: Heroes of Faith

Tell Me the Story: Meeting Jesus

Tell Me the Story: Armor of God



Lesson 1

A Church That Shines

Acts 1:1-11

Key Verse:

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 1:8).



WARM UP

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his great “I Have a Dream” speech. Pivotal to the American Civil Rights Movement, King’s words transcended the times, calling Americans to dream for the future. A future marked by the best in human character. A dream of equality and justice. A dream that could and would change the face of America.

Imagine being asked to dream like that for the church today. Imagine standing before God’s people and calling Christians to dream of a church that is relevant, passionate, and focused. A church where people meet Jesus and are changed. A church that touches lives and makes a difference. A church that carries its mission into homes, grocery stores, and neighborhoods. A church that shines.

What does it mean to “shine”? A church that shines is so immersed in the nature and character of Jesus that we become transparent dis-

plays of His love, grace, and transforming power. We live as a people who allow the presence of Christ to illuminate the world we live in. We shine with a treasure that lives and works inside of us to call the world around us into deeper relationship with Jesus.

God's dream is for His church to shine. He longs to transform His people into transparent vessels who carry Christ into the world. Acts is, at its simplest and most profound, a picture of this transformation. It is the story of believers who commit themselves to reflecting the image of Jesus Christ. Walking through Acts provides us with more than just a history of the early church. It is filled with powerful markers that help us, as the church today, become the living image of Christ in the world.

WORK OUT



Four Characteristics of a Church That Shines

As Acts begins, Luke paints a picture of Christ's church in broad, sweeping strokes. It is the picture of a body that moves at the will of the Head. It is a family that shares and suffers together. It is a launching point for the spread of the good news, and a house being built up to the glory of God. These first eleven verses in Acts point directly to the foundation upon which the church is built, the authority under which the church lives, and the message the church is given to live out and declare.

Jesus' resurrection is the foundation and focus of a church that shines (Acts 1:1-5).

Acts opens by pointing to the cross and the empty tomb. The resurrection becomes a beacon of hope and a testimony proclaiming the power of God. Jesus appears, and for forty days He walks among His disciples, speaks to them, and shows them that He has the power to bring new life, new purpose, and new direction to their lives. The power of the resurrection is the rock-solid foundation of the church.

The resurrection is still our foundation. The resurrection is more than the belief in an event that happened 2000 years ago. The resurrection is real today. It continues to shape our lives, our hearts, and our vision. Its power transforms us today.

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the essence of the gospel and the hinge point of Christian faith. In 1 Corinthians 15:12-14, Paul explains the futility of a faith that is void of the power of the resurrection of Jesus. His resurrection seals our hope that we will rise to live with Him. His resurrection empowers the new life that we are given in the waters of baptism.

In order to be a church that shines, we must be a people who intentionally build on the foundation of Christ. Our Bible study must be full of who Christ is, how He shapes us, and how He moves in the world today. Our conversation must be full of language that points others to see Jesus. Our hearts must understand that Jesus holds the answer to all of our questions. Our movement in the world must declare that Jesus is able to fill all our needs. Every part of who we are must rest on the foundation that Jesus is the risen Savior.

Jesus is the authority of a church that shines (Acts 1:6-7).

The disciples voice their hope that Jesus might now be ready to establish a kingdom and take His place on a throne. Jesus pulls them

back into the light of God's sovereignty. He tells them that the authority of the Father must reign fully in their lives, and be the guiding force in their movement in the world. Every question must be answered by the truth of Jesus. Every move must first be illuminated by the movement of God.

Jesus is still our authority. We live in a world that sells control and idolizes power. The voices of the world call us to follow the latest fad or walk popular paths to success. Wealth, influence, power, and education are all hailed as the saviors of humanity.

Christians don't live by the agendas of the world or follow their own plans. The church lives and moves within the authority of Jesus, the Head. We follow His lead and walk in His steps. We listen for His voice and heed His call. Living under His authority means actively waiting for His guidance, and moving only in accordance to His will. Living under authority means we wade through the voices of the world, yielding only to the call of Christ.

In order to shine, we must put every decision that we make under the authority of Jesus. Frequently, this is where our transparency gets tested. We are often led to a place where the voice of Jesus is drowned out because we want to fit in or pursue a worldly path to pleasure or success. This is why it is so important to live and walk with a church that is centered on the authority of Jesus. A church that shines makes it a priority to encourage each other to make good decision and to remember that Jesus is shaping us into His image. A church that shines models transparent living for each other and the world through its relationships, ministry areas, and focus.

Jesus is the message of a church that shines (Acts 1:8).

In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells the disciples that they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. They are to

take His name and His light to every corner of their world. The church that bears His name will proclaim one message – Jesus. It will shine with one light – Jesus. It will offer one hope – Jesus.

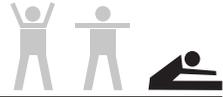
Jesus is still our message. Christians carry the light of Jesus with them wherever they walk. The darkest corners of the world need to be touched by the healing, merciful message of grace that flows from the cross and the resurrection.

The message the church is to proclaim is very specific and directed. We are to be His witnesses – we are to tell what we know, what we believe, what we understand, and what we have experienced. In order to shine, we must plant the grace of God in the lives of each person we meet through the day. We are to illuminate the path to the cross and ignite a fire of desire to stand with Jesus in the power of the empty tomb.

Jesus is the hope of a church that shines (Acts 1:9-11).

Looking up into heaven, the apostles witness the great hope of our faith. *This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (vs. 11).* With this message planted firmly in their lives, the disciples begin the process of establishing a church that is focused on Jesus.

Jesus is still our hope. Christians live with a unique hope – Jesus is coming back to take us home to be with Him. That hope is not a distant dream, but a present anticipation that must shape our daily walk. The anticipation of His return molds our priorities, shapes our values, focuses our vision, and defines our days. This is what living in hope is all about. Churches that shine help us see the power of Jesus today and excite us about the promises of Jesus that will be fulfilled tomorrow.



Living the Dream

Zeroing in on the central message of Acts, we find that Jesus is the heart and core of the church that shines. Christians are called to be a people who live out the nature and character of Jesus in every moment – with each other, our families, neighbors, and our community. In order to do that, Jesus Christ must be at the center of everything we are and do.

Acts 1:1-11 lays out the principles that will guide and shape the church throughout its beginnings and its spread in the world. These principles are to be the foundational truths on which the church is built today as well. Jesus is the *focus* of the church. His death, burial, and resurrection provide the grace and power that allow us to walk in relationship with Him each day. Jesus is the *authority* of the church. We must allow Him to shape our plans and mark our paths. Jesus is the *message* of the church. The cross must be central in everything we say and do. Jesus is the *hope* of the church. We are called to live lives of anticipation. Joy and hope shape our days as we await the return of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be a church that shines?
2. Why is the resurrection so pivotal to Christians and the church? How does the resurrection make a difference in your life today?
3. Sometimes the surrendered life calls for us to wait and other times it calls for us to move. Which is easier/harder? Why?
4. How do Jesus' words in Luke 8:39 sum up the message He gives us to share with the world?
5. Describe three concrete ways that living in anticipation of Christ's return will impact the way that you walk through your week.