

UNSTOPPABLE

GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD

UNSTOPPABLE YET UNFINISHED

Lesson 27

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DEVOTIONAL

On September 2, 2000, the Sydney Olympic torch relay came through the town in which I live. The Olympic torch had originally been lit by the sun's rays at a special ceremony in Olympia, Greece. When the flame finally arrived in Australia, it stayed for 100 days, being carried by 11,000 torchbearers through more than 1,000 towns. The torch visited every state and territory, and it journeyed within one hour's drive of 85% of the Australian population.

Apart from the traditional runners, the torch travelled via train, plane, bicycle, stock horse, camel, tram, road train, row boat, Chinese dragon boat, canoe, ferry, solar-powered vehicle, surf boat and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. And on a wet, overcast Saturday morning, the torch came through my town. What was interesting was the massive excitement the Olympic torch relay generated, especially amongst the torchbearers themselves.

One of them told me, "It's such a privilege to be involved in an event this big. I may never do anything else, but I'll be able to tell my children that at least their mum carried the Olympic flame." Another commented, "Going to work each day, doing the washing, watching the TV, it's all so small. But to carry the Olympic flame even for a little while, it's so much bigger than anything else I've done. I wanted to be part of the relay because I wanted to be part of something bigger than my life."

Do you sometimes feel like that?

The alarm goes off in the morning, you roll out of bed for another day and it's the same old routine. Everything seems so mundane and small scale.

Do you sometimes feel that it would be nice to be caught up in something a bit more spectacular than what your life usually seems to be?

The book of Acts is a wonderful book, because it helps us to see that when we are followers of Jesus we actually are caught up in something much bigger than ourselves.

As Christians, we are caught up in a worldwide movement that makes the Olympic torch relay pale into insignificance. We are involved in the passing on of a message that has been transforming people's lives in every single country on the face of this earth for thousands of years.

What's the key to seeing this?

Realizing that Acts is a book all about Jesus Christ.¹

¹ Mission Unstoppable Study Guide by Bryson Smith found @ www.matthiasmedia.com.au

OPEN IT

1. What is the hardest thing you have ever been asked to do? Did you back out or did you take it on? If the latter, were you successful, and why?

READ REVIEW IT

Why did Luke write Acts? Several theories are proposed, but probably his primary purpose was to provide an account of the beginnings of the Christian church in order to strengthen his readers' faith and to give assurance that its foundation is firm (I. Howard Marshall, Acts [IVP/Eerdmans], p. 21). Perhaps a skeptic had tried to convince Theophilus that his faith was based on myths or legends. Luke wants to show through his gospel and Acts that the accounts were based on eyewitness testimony given by credible men who were not promoting it for personal gain. In fact, they proclaimed the message in the face of strong opposition and even death.

Luke also intended to explain how the church spread from Jerusalem to Rome, encompassing both Jews and Gentiles, in accord with God's purpose. One key to understanding Acts is to see that it is a transitional book, showing how the worship of God moved from the Jewish temple, to the hesitant acceptance of Gentiles into the Jewish church, and finally to the Christian worship of predominantly Gentile churches all over the Roman empire. Acts shows us how God went from working primarily with the Jews as a nation to working with the church, comprised of Jews and Gentiles on equal footing. In Matthew 21:43, Jesus had told the Jewish leaders, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it." Acts shows us the transition that lasted from the death of Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which fulfilled Jesus' prophecy.

Acts records many miraculous signs that were given to prove to Israel that they had been wrong to reject Jesus as their Messiah and Lord. The main message that the apostles and others in Acts proclaimed centered on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which was the primary sign authenticating Jesus as the Christ, and on the offer of forgiveness of sins in His name. The apostles were given unusual miraculous power, authenticating them as God's witnesses to Jesus Christ and His resurrection. While God obviously can and does work miracles today (after all, He is God!), to claim as some do that miracles should happen today with the same frequency as in Acts is to miss the transitional nature of the book. God had a special purpose for miracles, to authenticate the apostles within this transition period.

In addition to the transitional nature of Acts with miracles to authenticate the message and the messengers, and the central message of Christ and His resurrection from the dead, there are several other themes running throughout Acts:

- The sovereignty of God in the founding of the church and the spread of the gospel. Clearly, God is at work and nothing can stop what He intends to do.
- The power of the Holy Spirit, given to all who believe in Jesus Christ.
- The importance of prayer in the life of the church.
- The importance of preaching God's Word. Acts contains numerous sermons and speeches, including eight by Peter, nine by Paul, one lengthy sermon by Stephen, and a shorter one by James. The addresses by Peter, Paul, and Stephen make up about 25 percent of the book.
- The importance of mission to all peoples. This outward thrust of the gospel is the main story line of Acts. Acts shows us how to do evangelism and missions.
- The reality of opposition and suffering in the spread of the gospel. Clearly, although God is sovereignly at work and nothing can stop what He is doing, His servants often suffer greatly, even unto death, in the cause.
- The life and organization of the church. Acts gives us glimpses of early church life that show us how the church dealt with problems as it grew.²

² Sermon Excerpt by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-1-church-continuing-what-jesus-began-acts-11-2>

7. In what ways has the study of Acts strengthened your personal relationship with God?

8. What characteristic or attribute of God spoke to you the most during this study in Acts? Why?

9. What lasting changes have occurred in your life as a result of studying this miraculous and extraordinary work?!

FINAL THOUGHTS:³

Each of us needs to ask, “What about me? Am I as committed to the Great Commission of my Lord as I ought to be? Since God has protected and provided for me, am I relying on His power to do all that I can to see as many people reached for Christ, both locally and worldwide, as I am able?” I close with seven action points that will help you move in the right direction:

➤ **ASK GOD TO BURDEN YOUR HEART WITH THE LOST.**

Put it on your prayer list. If we are apathetic about those who are perishing, we are not like Jesus, who had compassion on the lost (Matt. 9:36) and who wept over the unbelieving city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

➤ **GET SOME TRAINING SO THAT YOU CAN CONFIDENTLY SHARE THE GOSPEL.**

There are many books that teach you how to share your faith. Memorize the verses you need to know to lead another person to faith in Jesus Christ.

³ This last section was adapted for Village Bible Church from a sermon excerpt by Steve Cole found @<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-71-mission-accomplished-acts-281-31>

➤ **INFORM YOURSELF ABOUT THE CAUSE OF WORLD MISSIONS.**

Visit your Campus Missions Wall or our villagebible.church/missions and learn about our Mission Partners around the world. Write them a letter and get to know them and the ministry that they are involved in.

➤ **READ MISSIONARY BIOGRAPHIES.**

The thrilling stories of those who have taken the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth will strengthen your faith and will encourage you to get fully behind our missionaries. Read about Jim Elliot and the men who gave their lives taking the gospel to the Auca Indians. Read about John Paton, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, William Carey, Bruce Olson, and others.

➤ **PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS.**

The tools mentioned above will help you be faithful in prayer. Sign up for missionary prayer letters and emails so that you can pray as special needs arise. We recently handed out Missionary Directories that can easily serve as a prayer guide.

➤ **GIVE SACRIFICIALLY TO THE GOSPEL'S WORK.**

Village Bible Church dedicates over 20 percent of all offerings to gospel work outside of our campus walls. Join in the grace of giving and become a blessing to those in need of the gospel. Invest your treasure into the gospel's work and your heart will follow your treasure.

➤ **AS GOD DIRECTS, GO AS A SHORT OR LONG TERM MISSIONARY.**

You don't have to be gifted as an evangelist, translator, or teacher to be used in missions. Every year our church sends all kinds of people to serve in many different ways. You won't regret it!!

10. Which of these are you willing to commit to engaging with in the days to come? What steps do you need to take to see this is accomplished?

A familiar legend tells of a conversation between Jesus and the angel Gabriel after the Lord ascended into heaven. They talked of what had happened down here—of Christ's birth, His life and ministry, His death, and His resurrection. Then Gabriel asked, "And how will the people of the world hear about all of this?" Jesus replied, "Well, I have a little company of friends there whom I have asked to publish it." "But what if, for any reason, they let You down and fail to do it?" To which the Lord answered, "I have no other plan." We're it! Let's commit ourselves to accomplish the mission the Lord has entrusted to us!

Note: This study was compiled, and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups