

## **“Writing Your Own Chapter” 9/14/03**

I would like to invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to the last chapter in the book of Acts. Acts chapter 29 beginning with verse # 1. You will find it on page in your pew Bible.

I am sure you will notice that there is no Acts 29. Now most of you knew that already but you pretended to leaf through your Bible so the person next to you would not feel foolish. There is no Acts 29 because it is still being written. The final chapter of this wonderful book of the Bible that describes the ever-widening expansion of the Gospel. And in every little small town church, and inner city storefront, and underground house church and every gathering large or small among every tribe and tongue and people through out the world, the never-ending story of Acts 29 goes on. In fact, the person sitting right next to you is writing Acts 29. The good news of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed in her job and in his neighborhood. God is still-hunting and searching for lost people reclaiming them for himself. God’s spirit is still being poured out on men and women and young people and children. We are not treading water until Christ comes again we are storming the very strongholds of the evil one and God is building his kingdom. Today I want to encourage you as you write out your part in the glorious story of the hope of the world. And so this morning I am going to be real personal. I am going to ask you what part you want to write. When that day comes that Acts 29 is opened for all of creation to stand tiptoe and read and it comes to that paragraph that has your name, what do you want it to say. Because it will be there. What do you want written next to your name?

So turn back to Acts 1:7-8 His disciples have just asked him when he is going to restore the kingdom to Israel and He *said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority"* Now notice verse 8 because this is the outline for the whole book of Acts. *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;*(and that will happen at Pentecost in a few short verse) *and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,*

*and to the ends of the earth.* Now here is the outline of the book. There's the first chapter when Jesus gives these instructions to his followers and they replace Judas. And then his talk about the Spirit coming and giving them power in chapter 2. And then the next five chapters are devoted to the story of them being witness in Jerusalem, the center of that day's religious leadership. And then roughly the next three and a half chapters are the stories of being witness in Judea and Samaria. And then the rest of the book begins the story of being witness to the end of the earth. The whole book of Acts is contained in this 8<sup>th</sup> verse. The rest of it is Luke's telling that what Jesus said was going to happen would in fact come true. It really happened. And today you and I are invited to be part of that continuing story. We are invited to join a long list of witness like Stephen and Paul and Peter and Apollos and Timothy and Priscilla and Aquilla. A list of people who are willing to stake their lives on the person of Jesus Christ as the only hope for the world. So this morning, as we work our way through this story, I want you in your hearts to begin to ask this question: **what part will I get to write?**

Now let's turn to Acts 2:46-47. It is the summary statement of the events that ended with Pentecost and the creation of the New Community. *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* Do you notice who is at work? Who added to the church? It doesn't say that clever people using imaginative strategies or persuasive techniques. You see that is the first question we have to ask and answer with perfect clarity. It says, "Daily the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." Now of course they were active. They were living out their faith in Christ. They were caring and serving and preaching, they were being bold but they never forgot that it was a God thing. If there was one thing that characterized the church of Jesus Christ from the very beginning it was their boldness. They gloried in the Gospel. They reveled in it. Paul

says, “*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of salvation. It is life to all who believe, to the Jew, to the Gentile.*” Paul says “I am not ashamed of it; therefore, let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” So here is the challenge for you this next week. **Are you willing to be bolder in your faith sharing?** Be one step bolder in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Take an extra risk this week. For some of you that means praying for another person. For others it means you need to ask someone a question about his or her spiritual life. For others it is to be even bolder and challenge someone to take the next step. For others a note or a card or a letter or perhaps it is to care for someone that you never cared for before. But notch it up. Raise the bar. Be bolder.

All right. Turn it over to Acts 6:7 The growth spoken of in Acts 2 is becoming a reality in Jerusalem. *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.* The church is not only growing but it is now including people that no one would have ever figured. Jewish priest were placing their trust in Jesus. And we see another pattern developing. Skip up to Acts 10:44-45. The Gospel is being preached to the Gentiles. Peter preaches and they open their hearts to God and bang. It happens. God’s spirit is poured out on the Gentiles and what do we read. *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.* Can you picture this? The Jewish believers exclaiming, “Good night. What’s God going to do next? Giving the Spirit to the Gentiles. So here’s the question. **Who’s too far away from God to hear the Gospel?** Who’s too far away that they don’t deserve, they don’t merit someone coming to them with the Gospel. And the answer is simple and clear. Nobody. No one is too far away. In our text are people that many said no way but in fact they were saying yes to God. Don’t ever assume somebody is going to say no.

Now turn over to acts 8 the end of verse 1. This follows the persecution and killing of Stephen. And after he died. ***On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.*** That is what happened. But look at the results in verse ***4 those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.*** The very act that the authorities thought would destroy the Gospel and stop its spread in Jerusalem God in His sovereignty uses to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The prediction of Jesus is coming true. Persecution comes and the professionals are allowed to stay in town but everybody else gets chased out. They become the witness in Judea and Samaria. A writer by the name of Michael Greene writes this. *One of the most striking features of evangelism in the early days of the church wads the people who engaged in it. Communicating the faith was not the preserve of the very zealous or the officially designated evangelist. Evangelism was the prerogative and the very duty of every church member.* **Who's got the job?** When it comes to evangelism, who's got the job? Me. Have you ever had one of your kids come into the room and say the infamous "golly gee Dad I am really bored". What they want you to do is to find a way for them to be entertained. I have discovered the hard way that to take that monkey on my back is a loosing situation. My response always is now, "I am sure that with all your creative abilities you can come up with something that will be very engaging and fun. Well, when it comes to evangelism there is never any Biblical intent to place the monkey on the backs of the professionals. Rather it is on the back of every person who claims the name of Christ follower. Everybody is writing Acts 29,

Now, over to acts 9:31 this is the next section. ***Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit; it grew in numbers,*** Then a striking phrase. ***Living in the fear of the Lord.*** These two things co-exist together, awesome reverence or the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. There is the

word that often appears. They increased in numbers. The Scripture is real concerned about numbers. Thorough out the book of Acts specific numbers are given. 12 become 11 and then there are the 120. Somebody numbered and somebody kept track. And after Pentecost 3000 were added. You know every once in awhile people say, "Our church isn't into numbers." Or "we're into quality not quantity." That is so bogus. If you go to the mall with four kids and come back with three and say, "oh, we are into quality not quantity and three is just fine" we would all say something is seriously wrong. Think about the classic heart of God passage in Luke 15. Ninety-nine sheep present one missing. Nine coins present one missing. Two sons in the family one missing. In fact there is a whole book in the bible called Numbers. There is not a person on this world about whom God does not say, "I want that one. I sent my Son for that one" **Who matters?** Everybody. So tomorrow let me suggest this discipline. Mentally as you walk through your day, in your heart say to every person you encounter for one hour. "You matter to God". And see if it does not develop a deeper urgency to reunite that lost loved person with His heavenly Father. Do it for 30 minutes over lunch as you walk through the skyway system or down the halls as you change classes.

Can we look at one other passage quickly? Acts 13:48 it is another milestone. *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.* Paulo and Barnabas had almost lost their lives in order to share the Gospel with these folks. Here is the question. **What is at stake in this business of the Gospel?** The answer: eternal life. This is not a casual matter.

This is not an extra add on or if you feel like it option. This business of writing Acts 29 is the real deal. What is at stake is a person eternity. Will it be Christ less or in His presence with joy evermore? And you know what. There are a significant number of people in your life for whom you are the only Christ follower they know. And they may not even know it. Well, there is a purpose

you know them. To love them with Christ's love. To serve them as Christ served and to share the good news of Jesus.

On September 27<sup>th</sup> we are having a class entitled "How To Become A Contagious Christian" And what I like most about this class is that it further develops the heart to reach those who don't know Christ and it helps you develop an evangelism style that fits the way God wired you. It begins promptly at 8:30 and will be done at 4 pm. The cost is \$25. I know that the real cost is giving up the day but more than that I know that some of you are afraid that if you go the Holy spirit will strike a cord in your life to be a little bolder and a little more intentional. But let me plead with you to take a risk. In your worship folders this morning is a registration form for the conference. Don't put it off another minute. Fill it out when we are done and take it right away to the church events booth.

I know I am really pushing it here but look at Acts 28:30 *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.* We really have no idea what happened to Paul. He would say it didn't matter. Here at the end of his life he is doing what he was created to do. To share the Gospel with those in his world even if it meant under house arrest. So let me ask you as we close. **Will you be the one to answer his call?** Will you be the one to take his light into a darkened world? Will you be the one?

Let us pray.

