

Church Growth In Acts

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
September 14, 2003
PM Worship

Introduction:

Many churches look at the worldliness which surrounds us and become discouraged. How can we, a small group of people, do anything to change our world? Having become discouraged many just quit trying. But we must never quit trying. Margaret Mead, an American anthropologist, said, "*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*" As a small group of committed Christians, we can change our community and even our world for Christ. I know we can, because I have seen it happen before—in the book of Acts.

Discussion:

- I. There were three kinds of people taught in Acts, just like today.
 - A. **Acts 10:1-2**: Like today, some people were seeking the proper way to serve God. We may have to work hard to find these people today, but they do exist.
 - B. **Acts 2:5**: Like today, some people were already devoted to a religion. We may have to teach hard to bring these people out of error, but there are many who will obey.
 - C. **Acts 17:16-18**: Like today, some people were pagans, idol worshippers and atheists. We may have to work hard to show these what they are missing, but some will obey.

- II. **Acts 17:32-34** demonstrates three responses to the Gospel, just like today.
 - A. *Some rejected the Gospel.* Today we will find this, but we must not focus on this.
 - B. *Some were skeptical.* Most people we meet are at this stage. They have seen so much confusion and division in religion that they do not know who to trust. They have heard so many contradictory things about God and the Bible, they do not know if what we say is true. But those who are skeptical, can be taught with patience.
 - C. *Some accepted the Gospel.* Despite what many Christians think, there are still people out there and even in this community who will accept the Gospel if they are taught.

- III. Notice the growth this small group of committed Christians caused with the help of God.
 - A. **Acts 1:15** – The group began with 120 disciples.
 - B. **Acts 2:41** – About 3000 were saved on the day of Pentecost.
 - C. **Acts 4:4** – The church numbered about 5000 men – perhaps up to 10,000 Christians.
 - D. **Acts 5:14** – Multitudes were being added to Christ's church.
 - E. **Acts 5:16** – The cities surrounding Jerusalem were also hearing the Gospel.
 - F. **Acts 6:7** – The church kept increasing. Even some of the priests were being saved.
 - G. **Acts 8:1** – A great persecution arose, causing the Christians to be dispersed from Jerusalem. However, this parallels Paul's point in **Romans 8:28**, God would use this dispersion for good for those who loved Him. The Gospel needed to travel to other cities and nations. Notice the response of the Christians to the dispersion in **Acts 8:4**. They did not give up; they went everywhere preaching the Gospel.
 - H. **Acts 8:5, 12-13** – A church was established in Samaria.
 - I. **Acts 8:26-28** – An Ethiopian is taught, who presumably took the Gospel into Africa.
 - J. **Acts 8:40** – The Gospel was preached in Azotus and Caesarea.
 - K. **Acts 9:23-25** – A church was present in Damascus.
 - L. **Acts 9:32** – A church had been established in Lydda.
 - M. **Acts 9:35** – A church was established in Sharon.
 - N. **Acts 9:36, 42** – A church was found in Joppa.
 - O. **Acts 10** – The church continued to grow because the racial barrier was broken and the doors of the church were opened by Christ to the Gentiles.
 - P. **Acts 11:20-26** – A church was established and grows in Syrian Antioch.
 - Q. **Acts 13:4-6, 12** – A church was established in Paphos on the isle of Cyprus.
 - R. **Acts 13:14, 42-43** – A church was established in Pisidian Antioch.
 - S. **Acts 14:1** – A church was established in Iconium.
 - T. **Acts 14:8, 19-20** – A church existed in Lystra.
 - U. **Acts 14:20-21** – A church was established in Derbe.

- V. **Acts 14:21-23** – Amazingly, Paul and Barnabas established elders in the congregations with which they had worked on this journey. While several factors contributed to men being qualified so quickly, we do see the need and urgency of having qualified men to lead the church. We must never rashly throw men into the eldership whether qualified or not. However, we must spend time training and qualifying men for the office.
- W. **Acts 16:32-34** – A church was established in Philippi.
- X. **Acts 17:1, 4** – A church was established in Thessalonica.
- Y. **Acts 17:10-12** – Many Bereans were converted, establishing a church there also.
- Z. **Acts 17:16, 34** – Some in Athens became Christians.
- AA. **Acts 18:1, 8** – A church was established in Corinth.
- BB. **Acts 18:18-21, 27** – A church existed in Ephesus.
- CC. **Acts 20:6-7** – A church was meeting in Troas.
- DD. **Acts 21:3-4** -- Paul found a church in Tyre.
- EE. **Acts 21:7** – A church also existed in Ptolemais.
- FF. **Acts 27:3** – A church was found in Sidon.
- GG. **Acts 28:13-14** – A church had been established in Puteoli.
- HH. **Acts 28:15-16, 24** – A church had already been established in Rome.
- II. When we go through **Acts** in this quick overview fashion, we understand clearly why the enemies of the church said the Christians had turned the world upside down (**Acts 17:6**). They were going everywhere. They were changing the world. So can we.

IV. How did they accomplish all of this?

- A. First, notice what they did not do to accomplish this. They did not establish world-wide organizations of churches. They did not storm Rome for a change in legislation. They did not develop armies to take the world by force. They did not take on social agendas to conquer social issues. They did not develop parachurch organizations. In fact, they did not really set out to change the world.
- B. Notice what they did do.
 1. They did not set out to change the world; *they set out to change individuals*. While there were groups of people converted, conversion was always an individual issue. As more individuals put on the new man (**Ephesians 4:22-24**) the world was changed.
 2. *They changed individuals by teaching*. In **Acts 2**, the multitude was changed based on the preaching of the apostles (**Acts 2:40**). In **Acts 8**, the Samaritans were changed because of the teaching of Philip (**Acts 8:5**). The eunuch was changed by teaching (**Acts 8:35**). Saul was changed by teaching (**Acts 9:6**). Cornelius was changed by teaching (**Acts 11:14**). There is only one way to change people. We must teach them the gospel. As **Romans 10:17** says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."
 3. *They realized they weren't the ones doing the changing*. In **I Corinthians 3:5-7**, Paul claimed that his job was simply to teach. God would bring the increase. The early Christians had success because they leaned on God, not on themselves. They understood that they could do all things through God who strengthened them (**Philippians 4:13**). They understood that God would work through them and accomplish great things (**Ephesians 3:20-21**). Because of this, the scripture records that the hand of the Lord was with them (**Acts 11:21**). If we are going to change people, we must lean on God to do the changing. Our job is just to do the teaching. If we do, God's hand will be with us and He will accomplish great things for His kingdom through us.

Conclusion:

We can have this same kind of response and growth, but only if we do what those Christians did, teaching others the Gospel. At the beginning of the book there were only 120 disciples. At the end there were thousands upon thousands and congregations all over the known world. We have the same Gospel. The question is what will we do with it?