



Acts and The Early Church (Week 1/8) Followed a Crucified King

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *How could you be more vulnerable with God so that you might grow in your experience and expression of his (vulnerable, unmerited, and sacrificial) love?*

Warm-Up

1. Do you think most Australians would consider Christians weird or distinctive in any way?
2. In what ways do you think Christians should be distinctive from our culture? Does that mean we should remove ourselves from our culture completely?

Read Acts 1:1-9

3. What has happened prior to the beginning of Acts? (Clue: look how the Gospel of Luke concluded.)
4. What was the *Alexamenos* graffiti? Why did it seem so strange that someone would worship a crucified king? Why do you think the first Christians were so compelling?
5. If the Gospel of Luke is about the life and ministry of Jesus, where does Acts (in a way, the second volume of Luke) find its focus? *Why did Luke think it important for us to know about the first Christians?*
6. Why were people so convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead? Why should we?
7. What does Jesus command the disciples *not to do*? What promise were they waiting to be fulfilled?
8. What was the question that the disciples asked in verse 6? What was their hope?
9. In what way were the first Christians (e.g., message, method, and the men/disciples) characterised by weakness? (cf. Acts 2:36)? If they were weak, what was the power that enabled them?
10. Do you think we share any of the weaknesses of the first disciples? Do we share the same power?
11. What was the last conversation you had with someone about Jesus (or Christianity) who was not yet a believer? Do you think they were surprised by anything that you said?
12. What are unhelpful ways that Christians can ‘stand out’ in our culture today? How would you love to be distinctive—as a Christian—on your frontlines?

Read Acts 1:10-11

13. What was the message that the disciples proclaimed? How far did it reach?
14. Do we proclaim the same message? How do we proclaim it? By what power do we proclaim it?
15. How do you think you are part of God’s mission? What is your greatest hope in following Jesus?
16. Give thanks for those who have proclaimed the Good News of Jesus faithfully over the centuries, pray also that we may be faithful in continuing this task.

Apply *On one of your frontlines, what is one way that you can be helpfully distinctive in order to demonstrate how your life has been transformed by the Gospel?*

Pray *Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus is the crucified and risen King! Help us to confess with our hearts and declare with our lips this glorious news. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*



GOING DEEPER

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On Your Frontline this Week

What are you giving your attention to actively at the moment? How is it shaping you?

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Acts 1” by Vaughan Roberts:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/acts-1/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Truth and Power” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/truth-and-power/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “You shall be my witnesses” by John Stott:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=221833&show_file=235255

Series Resources

- *Read (book):* “Strange Religion” by Nijay Gupta. 
- *Read (commentary):* “The Challenge of Acts” by Tom Wright. 
- *Read (book):* “Why the Gospel” by Matthew Bates.
- *Read (advanced commentary):* “Acts: Witnesses to Him” by Bruce Milne.

 [Available to borrow in the Church library](#)

ACTS: STRANGE RELIGION

*Week 1/5 “Followed a Crucified King”
by the Rev'd Adam Lowe (26/10/2025, Brisbane)*

Bible Passage: Acts 1:1-3

[Note about Bibles]

Loving Father, thank you that Jesus is the crucified and Risen King. Please help us to confess with our hearts and declare with our lips this glorious news. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Over the past four years, we've been *praying, planning, and dreaming* of planting a new Christian community here in Brisbane!

- At various times we've taken several steps forward, other times we've taken several steps back.
- There have been: *Decisions* to be made.
Roles to be recruited.
Resources to be allocated.
- It's taken a church to embrace a vision beyond their four walls.
It's been dependent on a core of people being raised up.
It's required discernment and approval from leaders in the church. /
- We can point to and acknowledge with gratitude, all sorts of things and people that have enabled us to be here today. /
- It's incredible that we can start meeting on the site where a church once stood. /
- But the **ultimate** cause for us being here today, is not because of our plans or our efforts.
The **ultimate** cause for us being here is because of one man:
who has become the centre of all human history...
He lived *2000 years ago and claimed to be God's Son and eternal King*;
He died *as he was crucified on a Roman cross; and*
He rose *physically from the dead and ascended to be at God's right hand*.
- **Jesus** is the ultimate cause for us being here today!

- In fact if he didn't live, die, *and* rise — there is no point to us being here today.
Now, I'm not sure what you think about the claims of Jesus,
but it is perfectly reasonable to kind of think, or say, this is all pretty strange!
- The claims of Christianity seem *outrageously* implausible.
We can kind of think sure, ancient people believed this stuff, but not us!
- But actually we *know* that these same claims about Jesus,
were just as implausible, *if not laughable, back then.*
- For the Jews at the time, the idea that God's King — the Messiah,
being crucified, was a scandal. It looks *like* failure.
They were expecting a King in the line of David, who would come along,
kick out the Romans, and ensure eternal rule. This certainly doesn't look like that.
A man from a backwater town in a regional place who ends up on a cross. /
- And for the Greeks, or the Gentiles at the time (*which just means those who weren't Jewish*),
the idea that this Jesus was some sort of King and God's Son was a joke.

In fact, if you visit the museum on Palatine Hill in Rome, you can see to this day a piece of graffiti that was etched into a stone wall around 200AD. It's a bit hard to make out, but basically there is a picture of a man with a donkey's head being crucified. The figure standing next to the cross, has his hand raised in an act of worship. / The inscription beneath it says: Alexamenos [h-leck-SAH-men-ohs] worships his God. // This isn't a compliment. The unnamed graffiti artist is making a mockery of this Christian, Alexamenos, hence the donkey's head, who worships this crucified King.

Ancient people weren't gullible!

Yet so convinced were these first Christians about Jesus,
that their lives were turned upside down,
as they radically reorientated everything around him. [Gupta]

- The priorities and claims of their lives looked so strange to those around them.
But the way they lived along with the message they proclaimed was compelling. //
- That's why for the first five weeks as we begin meeting together,
that we're going to be looking at a few chapters from the book of Acts,
to consider what made the early church distinctive in response to the Good News of Jesus.
- *In the hope and prayer,*
that we as a community would also be distinctively shaped in response to that same Good News.

So what made the first Christians distinctive? They were:

- **CONVINCED that Jesus Rose from the Dead;**
EMPOWERED by the Holy Spirit; and
SENT as Jesus' Witnesses.

CONVINCED (THAT JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD) | ACTS 1:1-3

First, these first Christians were **CONVINCED** that Jesus rose from the dead. *Acts 1, verse 1...*

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his **suffering**, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

The book of Acts is actually part of a two volume set *paired with the Gospel of Luke*.

- They share the same author.

And where the Gospel of Luke finishes up — with Jesus' resurrection and ascension, that's where the book of Acts continues.

- *The Gospel of Luke is an account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection... Acts picks up as the account of how the followers of Jesus, the church, continue with his mission.*
- In fact, *it's really interesting, this whole incident of the disciples encounter with the risen Jesus, is almost a repeat of what happens at the end of Luke. There's some overlap.*
- That's not because Luke forgot where he was up to when he started the second book, but it's an intentional device, a hinge connecting these two parts of the story, to show us that everything Luke has written hangs on Jesus' resurrection and ascension.
- If Jesus did not come back to life—and if he is still not alive—then none of this matters.

But Luke doesn't just expect that we'd take his word for it, but *that* we'd look to the evidence.

- In a way that's the whole point of why he writes the Gospel of Luke and Acts. *He's writing, in a sense, to convince Theophilus about all of these claims about Jesus which have been circling.*
- Luke is really methodical in his approach to writing.
- *Drawing up an orderly account. Carefully investigating everything from the beginning.*
- He's not only sought out the accounts of eyewitnesses, many of whom would still be alive. *(So you could go ask them if that's what they really thought and experienced.)*
- But he also appeals to the sheer variety of resurrection encounters that people had.
- It wasn't just a single day, but over forty days.

Both women and men witnessed the resurrection, in fact the women were first.

Jesus didn't just appear to individuals, but to groups, and even a crowd of 500.

It wasn't just to those who were more likely to believe, but it included Paul, who had made it his purpose to persecute Christians, even wipe them out.

- Even Jesus' brother, James, goes from being a *sceptic* to a *leader* in the early church.
- And the rest of the apostles, even though Jesus had told them, weren't expecting this: they go from disillusioned and scattered, fearing for their lives, to, basically overnight—being willing to put their lives on the line to proclaim Christ is risen.
 - You have to kind of ask, what must have unfolded for them to be transformed like this?
- There had been plenty of so-called people who claimed to be Messiahs at the time.

Many of them had been killed. But no one claimed that they had been raised *physically*. /

- Note that Luke goes to great extent to make that point.

Jesus was physically alive.

He gave many 'convincing proofs' as Luke details!

They saw him.

They spoke to him.

They touched him.

They shared meals with him.

As extraordinary as it might seem.

The resurrection is the only plausible explanation for why so many people became followers.

- As one Cambridge scholar, Moule, puts it... early Christianity,

Rips a great hole in history, a hole the size and shape of Resurrection. //

- I really want to encourage you that if you're not sure of what you think of the resurrection, that you might give it some examination. We'd be so happy to help with that!
- Because if it didn't happen, then it is of no importance, but if it did really happen, *just as the first Christians and those ever since have believed*, then that changes everything.

EMPOWERED (BY THE HOLY SPIRIT) | ACTS 1:4-8

Second, these first Christians were **EMPOWERED** by the Holy Spirit. *Acts 1, verse 4...*

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you."

By just about any measure of the time, the disciples looked weak.

- On their own, they weren't particularly impressive.
- They didn't have bucketloads of financial resources.
They didn't have a carefully mapped out strategic plan.
They weren't the most eloquent or qualified. //
Not the sort of people who make the short list to launch a global movement!
- Only a few days earlier they were huddled or hiding away.
But now Jesus is sending them to the ends of the earth. /
- Note what they ask Jesus: is this the moment? Verse 6...
Are you now going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

- Finally, they must be thinking. Now Jesus is going to overthrow the Romans.
- But his answer is surprising.
- 1. It's not for you to know. *That's the Father's business, not yours.*
- 2. You need to wait. *There's nothing you can do to gain this power on your own.*
- 3. Because this power will be given to you.

One of the key reasons why these first Christians were able to do what they did, had nothing to do with a power that comes from within, but because of a power — in the very person of the Holy Spirit — *who* will come to them.

- *In the ancient world power was acquired from status, wealth, military might, perhaps a favour from the gods, or because someone else acted as a patron, a protector and provider on your behalf.*
- But Jesus is saying *in effect...* None of that will do.
- For the only power that will help you to:

understand my words;
love according to my ways;
faithfully endure challenges;
grow in my likeness; and go where I send, is a power that comes from me. /
- It had long been God's promise to dwell with his people. /
 Jesus is telling them that because of his resurrection a whole new era has arrived,
when the Spirit of God takes up residence in the heart of every believer, so that we can follow him.

- *The same power that was alive in the first disciples is at work in every believer today!*

Whenever I come home from shopping and I have to take the grocery bags from the boot of the car to the house, I almost always try to make it in one go, or in as few goes as is humanly possible. Sometimes it must look absolutely ridiculous. And of course, when I reflect on my life, there are much more serious times when I am kind of deluded to think I can do it on my own. Or I must do it on my own. There are times when I push away help, maybe even resent help because I've got this distorted idea that I should be able. My life, in a way, must look like someone ridiculously struggling with the shopping bags.

But if you're a follower of Jesus you don't need to operate like that — in fact you can't!

We can't buy into the modern idea that you've got this on your own.

That if you want to know true strength and power you just need yourself.

- No. We've got to keep looking to God. To his strength and his power.
 If we are quick to acknowledge that it is by Jesus' power that we're saved,
 why would we think that it is by our own power that we live as his followers? //
- When Jesus says John baptised with water,
 it's a reminder that John the Baptist called people to repent, to turn back to God.
 But when we *repent and* put our trust in Jesus as Saviour,
 we are given the very gift of his Spirit *alive in us.* //

- As we seek to nurture the life of this community,
 As we long to take our place in the building up of Christ's church,
 As we make, mature, and multiples disciples of Jesus,
 we cannot possibly do that by our own strength and power. [example wait]
- As we each follow Jesus in our everyday lives but also as a new community, there will be so many times when we'll be tempted to go it alone. Do it in our strength. *BUT:*
- The only way that we'll be able to: *love and care for another with a love like Christ has for us.*
 The only way that we'll be able to: *share the good news by word and example.*
 The only way that we'll be able to: *persevere in the face of disappointment.*
 The only way that we'll be able to: *enjoy fruitfulness without it going to our heads.*
 The only way that we'll be able to: *patiently bear with one another.*
 is by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit whom God has given to us.
- That's why the disciples had to wait until the day of Pentecost.
 That's why they could be so radically distinctive.
 That's why they could respond to God's call without fear. //
- We'll explore more about this next week,
 but the good news is that we don't have to wait for that gift.
- If you're a Christian, you have already received the Holy Spirit!
- And if you're not yet a Christian, *and you're here today,*
 then the Spirit is already at work in your heart drawing you to himself.

SENT (AS JESUS' WITNESSES) | ACTS 1:8ff

Finally, these first Christians were **SENT** as Jesus' witnesses. *Back to verse 8...*

...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."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Note that when Jesus says that we are to be *his* witnesses,
 it means that the role of every disciple, every follower of Jesus,
 is to keep pointing back to him.

- That means:
telling other people about Jesus;
living in a way that reflects that he is Lord;
making sacrifices to serve his agenda;
depending on the power of the Spirit; *and*
going wherever he sends us.
- For most of us, that will mean right where God has us now.
 Where we live and learn; shop and serve; work and play.
- For some, it might mean being part of this community as it grows into its mission.

- But for everyone, it means that our purpose is to keep pointing back to Jesus; in the power that has been given to us as promised by Jesus.
- *It's extraordinary that God has placed his mission into the hands of ordinary people. //*
- I love that at the end of this part in Acts 1, as Jesus ascends into heaven, *which means Jesus still lives, is still human, and still reigns*, as the disciples are looking intently up into the sky, two angels suddenly appear and say:

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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.”

- It's like they're saying, he will come back — how we look forward to that day, but right now, you need to get on with his mission until that glorious day! //
- If you're a follower of Jesus, you share in that mission. To keep declaring and demonstrating to the world that Jesus is Lord.
- When Jesus said that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, he wasn't kidding.
- This good news hasn't just made it across the world, even to this ELC in Salisbury, but it's made it across time from one generation to the next, to right now.
- Isn't it remarkable! It made it to us, right here! 2000 years later!

- It's the same news about Jesus that Luke shared. And it carries the same invitation.

That we wouldn't only be **convinced** of what is true about Jesus, but that we would be **convicted** by the truth of who Jesus is. //

- Following Jesus doesn't mean everything will be smooth sailing. Following Jesus doesn't mean we'll be certain of every single thing. *But it does mean we're secure in relationship with God — we're forgiven and reconciled to him, and having an ultimate security for the future — in his kingdom which is to come. //*
- John Stott put it like this:

Insistence on security is incompatible with the way of the cross. What daring adventures the incarnation and the atonement were! What a breach of convention and decorum that Almighty God should renounce his privileges in order to take human flesh and bear human sin! Jesus had no security except in his Father. So to follow Jesus is always to accept at least a measure of uncertainty, danger and rejection for his sake.

- In Acts 2, when Peter is addressing the crowd, and declares that this Jesus whom they crucified is both Lord and Messiah, some people present are cut to the heart—they’re concicted—and say, *what shall we do?*
- And Peter says simply:
- “Repent—that is turn to God, recognising who Jesus is, being sorry for our sin—and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” //
- That’s the invitation. It’s an invitation for forgiveness and life.
- It’s possible because Jesus died for us.
It’s possible because Jesus triumphed over the grave.
- The *strange, surprising, and spectacular news*
is not only that Jesus has rescued us from our sin,
but that he is alive, and we are his witnesses, until he returns.