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Okay, so this morning we're going to continue the introduction of AXE. Last week we did part one of the introduction of AXE and the reason why we're doing this is because we really need to set the stage of really what our study is going to be. So last week we talked to, last week we talked to, I don't see Terry Barb so she's not in the waiting room.

So last week we talked about the first half of AXE, okay, we talked, we will talk about basically the church, how the apostles were timid and so forth, and the fact that they became bold and the reason why of that. So we're going to continue that theme this morning and we're going to wrap up the view of where we're going and then when we want to come back from vacation we're going to get into AXE and study it on a verse-by-verse basis like we're doing Ephesians right now. But I wanted to do this so that you could sort of get your head around AXE because you've not been taught this in AXE, okay, you know, you didn't understand that the apostles went through a transition themselves, even getting into AXE because they had never preached until AXE and it wasn't until after they received the Holy Spirit that they were able to go do that.

You know, Christ sent them out on some errands and stuff like that to just train them up in the course of their training, but they didn't actually go out and preach until they received the Holy Spirit, which was at the Day of Pentecost. So let's continue. You can open your Bibles, if you have them, or your electronic device or whatever, to the Book of AXE somewhere in the early chapters.

We're going to get there because I'm going to be touching on a few things there and I want you to get a sense of what is coming. So we're going to look more towards the big picture of this incredible history that's identified in AXE. So, you know, Jesus said in Matthew 16 and 18, I will build my church and he always accomplishes whatever it is that he intends to do.

Now, this is consistent with God, of whom the prophet Isaiah says his purpose is always accomplished. I will build my church, God's eternal purpose, to glorify himself through redeeming sinners and bringing them into his heavenly presence forever continues after the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, and the ministry of the building of that church continues in the first generation through the apostles and the early believers.

Christ is the cornerstone of the church and the apostles provide the foundational stones to build that church, which is building of God that goes on until the end of the church age, which is what we're doing now. So we are writing a chapter in the Book of AXE, okay? We're in the 21st century. You can go back century by century and continue the Book of AXE from where it was left off when Luke stopped it with Peter's imprisonment in Rome, but you can continue that through, which we have seen because we've seen seven letters that tie to the church age in our study of Revelation.

So the story of the church begins in the Book of AXE and it doesn't end until we get to the fullness of time, which is basically the rapture. AXE is the first volume of the church history and it is history, but it is loaded with a lot of theology because everything essential to life and growth of the church was theological. It had all to do with the truth of the divine revelation.

And the reason, another reason why I wanted to do this introduction is because I want you to see, because we're far enough into Ephesians, you should see the tie-in that AXE does with Ephesians because it's all of the church. So it all had to do with the truth of the gospel. So while we say AXE is history, we have to rush into immediately say it is history based upon the impact of sound doctrine and the theology.

Now the Book of AXE records the story of the church from its explosive beginning of the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem all the way to the final chapter, which is the imprisonment at Rome of the greatest misceterian history of the church from the Apostle Paul. So this goes from the day of Pentecost until the first imprisonment of Paul in Rome. It sweeps over a period of about 30 years and three decades.

And in that period of time, the church expands from one congregation on the day of Pentecost of about 120 people to the point at the end of the Book of AXE where not only have there been tens of thousands of believers added to the church, but the church has expanded beyond Jerusalem. The church has gone into the Gentile world, into Antioch, and then through the ministry particularly of the Apostle Paul, it has gone throughout the Mediterranean world moving west. So by the time we come to the end of the Book of AXE, there are dozens of churches spread across the known world, some beginnings and glorious culmination.

Even by the time you get through the first 30 years of the history of the church, it is unparalleled the explosive growth of the church. In just those few years, the church literally explodes across the Gentile world, starts out with a small gathering of Jewish believers, ends up with tens of thousands of believers in Gentile churches as Great Commission begins to be fulfilled. And you can also understand from history that God's detail is perfect.

He said you're going to start out with Judea, Samaria, right through the process. And if you follow the history, that is exactly what happened. So the Great Commission laying out country by country by country, then the world is exactly what happened.

So the process of the Books of AXE follows the promise of the Book of AXE. The promise is in chapter 1, verse 8. You will see power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses unto me in exactly how he says is exactly how it goes.

The church first with the gospel in Judea, and then in Samaria, and then the church expands out of Samaria to the outermost part of the world being the Gentiles. The main person in the Book of AXE is God himself, because it's his story of God's redemptive plan unfolding. Okay, we studied in Ephesians this week the first blessing that occurred before the foundation of the world.

Okay, so now this ties in, because what you see in AXE is the development of the church following the process that we see laid out in Ephesians chapter 1. He continues his salvation, his redemption saga, saving sinners through the gospel of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the apostles and those who accompanied them. The unanimous testimony, by the way, of the early church is that Luke is the author of the Book of AXE. We've already gone through that.

That is a uniform confession by the early church that Luke was the writer. That is to say that the earliest church, the closest to the apostle era, affirmed Luke as the writer, and they would have known, and so down through history there's been no question about his authorship, no legitimate question. So numerous times through the Book of AXE you will find the collective use of we.

The collective use of we, such as in chapters 16, 20, 21, and 27, and 28, and that's an indication that Luke is present. Luke is part of Paul's ministry. Now I told you in last time that Luke was not an apostle.

Luke was a historian, so he walked with the disciples to record history. He was also a physician, a doctor, and he provided a lot of the physical needs associated with making sure that their bodies were in order to continue the process. And the reason for that is this, is because Christ didn't want to heal everything all the time.

He wanted you to understand the fact that when he leaves, you've got to be able to do this on your own. He's not going to be around just saying, oh, you know, you're sick today. Okay, let's just throw it out the window and we'll be done.

He wanted you to understand you have to take ownership and responsibility of your health. So Luke was part of that process. Clearly, though, Luke is the writer because if you look at chapter one, verse one, it begins the first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach.

He doesn't introduce himself any more than to say, I am the one who wrote the first account to you, which means the gospel of Luke. Theophilus, if you go back to the gospel of Luke chapter one in verse three, you'll read, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus. Both of these volumes, the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, were written by the same writer and written to the same individual.

And Luke is unquestionably that writer. It is likely that the Holy Spirit inspires Luke to write the book of Acts sometime during Paul's imprisonment. That's how the book of Acts ends.

And it may have ended there because that's when Luke wrote it. And so he was writing up to the very moment he was inspired to write the book of Acts and then gives us the history of the apostles fulfilling their calling, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to go from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to the world, preaching the gospel for the building of the church. Now, as we saw last week, these gospels seem like an unlikely group.

These apostles seem like an unlikely group to be able to affect the world in any dramatic way. Why? Because they were amazingly weak. They were hardheaded.

They were insecure. They didn't follow Jesus's commands. They're just like us.

They're just a group of 12 guys that lived their life trying to understand who Jesus Christ was. They had seemingly repeated problems understanding what Jesus was telling them. He castigated them on numerous occasions for weaknesses of their faith.

If you read the scriptures, you're going to see that. Matter of fact, he praised Peter and says, you're going to be one of the rocks that build my church on the rock himself. And then the next time you hear Peter come into the picture, Jesus told him to get behind him, Satan.

Okay. So you see that these guys are no different than we are. And they were struggling just like we struggled.

So if they were going to literally turn the world upside down as they would, there was going to have to be a pretty dramatic transformation in those men. By the time you come to the account of the Lord's death in the gospels, they are weak, frightened, fearful, scattered, and confused. They were unstable.

And when you come to the end of John's gospel, it appears that a group of them have actually gone back to their former profession. And they're back fishing. They seem beligged.

Okay. They're troubled. They seem inadequate for any monumental task.

But as the book of Acts opens, they're a completely different group of men, bold, powerful, clear-minded, effective, and useful. And so last week we asked the simple question, what happened? Well, one of the things that happened was the resurrection. Of course, that would turn anybody's head.

Seeing somebody that was dead, you know, rise up from their tomb, that would have turned anybody. And that energized them out of the sorrow that they were in when they thought that their hopes had all been dashed by the crucifixion. Yes, the resurrection had a massive impact on them, of course.

And we could add the coming of the Holy Spirit empowered them. The resurrection let them know that their Savior was alive, and the Holy Spirit gave them the power to fulfill their responsibility. And you even know that it's Christ because the teaching that he was teaching before his death was the first teaching that he continued after he was risen.

So it was a continual thought. You knew that this was the same man. He left talking this way, and he's coming back talking this way.

So there's another critical element that shows up early in the Book of Acts that, in my thoughts, made a big, huge difference in these men. For they understood for the first time the unfolding of the plan of redemption from the Old Testament. That's exactly what we're studying in Ephesians now.

You're getting an understanding exactly what they understood from the Old Testament, but we're looking at the New Testament through the Book of Ephesians. You're seeing that from before the beginning of the world, everything about your life was settled. That was exactly what they saw in the Old Testament, because they could see the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophets through Jesus Christ.

And then they got the big picture. If you understand everything, which we're going to do in studying Ephesians, if you understand everything about the big picture of life, and see the process of how it was done, there is no reason that you should feel fear or unempowered. Because you now know what happened, and you now know what the Scriptures tell about you.

So up to this point, you never heard about the apostles quoting the Old Testament and read through the Gospels. So they now understand for the first time what the Old Testament is doing and how it applies or how it's fulfilled in Christ. But as soon as you come to the Book of Acts, even before the day of Pentecost in chapter 1, you find Peter quoting the fulfillment of the Old Testament, even as regards to Judas.

Judas was prophesied of what he was going to do. And then when you come to into chapter 2, there's more quoting of the Old Testament. Come into chapter 4, more quoting of the Old Testament.

The sermon preached in chapter 7 and 13, Old Testament sermons, you come into the ministry of the apostle Paul, and repeatedly and repeatedly, like the apostles before him, he is convincing people that Jesus is the Messiah by using the Old Testament. Here's one thing that I challenge you. If you cannot take the Old Testament and prove Jesus Christ's life, His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, and the redemption of sin through His finished work, you don't know Christ.

Because in the Old Testament, it gave you all of that. That's why it's important to study the Old Testament, because the details, the unveiling of the details for the New Testament being revealed is the Old Testament prophets. So you ought to be able to walk through the Old Testament and give exactly what the New Testament is telling us.

So in this, we find that when you come to the end of the Book of Acts, that's exactly what the people, what apostle Paul is doing. In chapter 28, verse 23, they came to him at his lodging. Now remember, he was a prisoner of Rome, but he was allowed visitors.

So they came to where he was lodging. That is, they came to Paul, and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses, because remember, the apostles had to move the people from the law into the promise of faith, and from the prophets from morning until evening. And that's how the Book of Acts begins with an understanding of the Old Testament.

And that's how it ends, with the proclamation of the truth of the Old Testament. For the first time, these apostles, and of course, Paul sees the big picture. They see that God's unfolding plan of redemption continues on schedule, which is what we're learning in Ephesians.

We got through the first part of it this week with the understanding of divine election. This week, we're going to get into the legalistic identification of really what redemption means, utilizing Roman law. They were aided in their understanding of the Old Testament because Jesus taught them on the road to Emmaus, just a small group of them.

And later that night, according to Luke 24, he taught the rest of them in the upper room, the day of his resurrection from the Old Testament, explaining the meaning of the Old Testament and how it is fulfilling him. And then if you look in chapter 1, verse 3, it tells us that he has presented himself alive after his suffering by many convincing proofs, approving to them over a period of 40 days. And what did he do? He was speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

What's the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is the millennium and the eternal life after that. He was speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. This would have been instruction in the scripture, the promises of God to bring and build and advance his kingdom.

So by the time they appear on the scene to fulfill their calling in the book of Acts, they know Christ is alive. The Spirit will empower them, and they have a clear understanding of the Old Testament. They quote with a clarity and seemingly almost freedom Old Testament passage that are fulfilled in Christ and in the events surrounding Christ.

So they just kind of helps us to understand how they were so totally transformed. So they see the big picture. They know Christ is alive.

They're empowered by the Holy Spirit. And now what do they do? They go out to be witnesses unto Christ, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the church begins to explode. Okay, it starts with 120 in chapter one, and then there are 3,000 that are added to the church in chapter two.

Then there are thousands more that are added in chapter four, and then there are more and more and more all the way through the book of Acts. The church literally explodes, and the Lord fulfills his promise to build his church through faithful preaching of the gospel. And we understood that in looking at what the gospel is, it is a single transcendent message.

It never changes. So when we go out and we do our activities associated with our responsibilities in bringing people to the knowledge of Christ, we use the single gospel. We don't need to use anything else.

Now as we approach the book of Acts, then we want to ask this sort of transcendent question. God used them to build the church, but what were the elements that brought about that end? Okay, so there's elements, there's processes that he used to build the church. Now you need to get this, because this is in addition to the before the foundation, the world taking care of your life.

This is the process that he used to build the church. In other words, they were the human means by what were the elements that God used them to do that produced this kind of growth. This is the greatest story of the church growth in history.

This is the original awakening, the original explosion of a spiritual life. And by what spiritual means did these human instruments of God bring this about? Well, I'm going to give you, I gave you two of them last time, right? We talked about the transition message and whether they were in Jerusalem or whether they were in Rome or all stops between throughout the entire world, the message never changed. It never changed.

Paul summed it up, I'm determined to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified. I don't come to you with human wisdom. I don't come to you with superiority of speech.

Matter of fact, Paul was not a great speaker. Okay, as it told the Corinthians, the message never changed. The message was never altered by the culture.

It was never accommodated to the culture. They paid no attention to foreign tradition, custom or expectation. You're going to get more in this when we get into Ephesians and begin to look at the application side to our lives.

They literally stepped in with an alien message calling people essentially to bow their knee to a crucified Jew rejected by his people, crucified by the Romans, but who was God in human flesh and who provided an atonement for the sins on the cross. Now, a stunning and startling, shockingly, basically foolish message to a Gentile world and a stumbling block to the Jews. This message never changed.

It was Peter in chapter two on the day of Pentecost preaching about Jesus of Nazareth, who is God's son, who died for our sins all the way to the Apostle John in prison preaching the same message. It was a transitional message. Okay, the second thing we talked about last week was we saw that they understood the church was a regenerate fellowship, a regenerate congregation.

Okay, what does that mean? That means when you're saved, God completely gives you a new body. It's a regenerated body, which means that your sinful DNA is taken away and God's DNA takes its place. Right? Remember all of the substack teaching.

That's what happened. We saw that in chapter two. I don't need to tell you anything more about it than to point you to verse 42 and the following.

They were continually devoting themselves to the epistles, teaching to fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. That is what our lives should be, by the way. Not social lives.

This is what our life should be. Those are the things believers do. If you don't do that, then how are you being useful and fruitful to Christ? Just think about it.

Okay, they were together. They were together all the time. Remember the people that came into Jerusalem stayed there and Paul had to go out and raise money to give money to the Jewish people living in Jerusalem, housing these people, you know, taking care of them so that they could actually stay there.

All 3,000 of them, they were feeling a sense of awe. They had all things in common and they held all their possessions lightly in case somebody else needed them. They were together.

That wonderful statement in verse 44. Day by day, in verse 46, continually with one mind in the temple. One mind.

We're all one mind. The temple is what? Is us. They were also a physical temple, but the temple is us breaking bread from house to house.

That's the temple. If you're the temple, house to house is your temple. Taking the meals together with gladness, sincerity of heart, praising God, having favor with the people.

This is the church. This has not changed today. They understand that it is a redeemed fellowship.

If you're one in the body of Christ, you're one together. You're not separate. They were committed to things that believers do.

They listened to sound doctrine. They engaged in spiritual fellowship and communion, which is exactly what we're supposed to be doing. They come to the Lord's table where they break bread and they're committed to prayer.

Their elements were expressions of the life of the regenerate, your changed body. There was nothing about it that was for spectators. There's nothing about it that was some kind of entertainment.

It was all expression of regenerate life. It was designed for worship. Okay, so that should tell you that part of your worship is the loving of your new body.

Christ gave it to you. You love it. You take care of it.

You feed it. You grow. That's a form of worship.

It was designed for edification. But you say, can the church grow that way? The church grew through the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the cross. One transcendent message.

That's how the church grew. It didn't come by, you know, let's go have a social outing and drink cocktails and have hors d'oeuvres. Okay, it came from a transcendent message that you used for the time of fellowship in your home.

The church grew through that transcendent message wherever it went. And the church also grows when the church is the church. We're going to learn about the church.

Okay, in Ephesians, you will notice at the end of verse 47, the Lord was adding to their number day by day, those who were being saved. That's how you grow a church. You don't grow a church.

The Lord grows the church. You don't do anything except be responsible for a tool and open your mouth and let God speak through you to your network. Oh, by the way, I want to go back to Luke.

And I meant to mention this earlier. When Luke wrote the letter to Theophilus, why was he writing the letter to Theophilus? Because they needed to distribute the knowledge of what Christ did to a large group of people. The first ever network marketing concept.

He used people of influence. He trained them in what they needed to do, and they went and did it. And because of their networking, they were able to distribute the gospel of Christ more abundantly than just going from house to house and town to town.

Because these guys had a following network marketing. You are a church, and the Lord adds to the church. The church understood that it gathered to worship, it gathered to be edified, it gathered to fellowship, and it scattered to proclaim the gospel.

And the Lord added to the church. So now we come to the third, maybe, and we're going to get to as many of these today as possible. If not, we'll just get them when we get into the book.

But I want to leave you with as much as possible for your studying to get prepared for the the verse-by-verse view of Acts when I come back. The early church also grew because of what you call a faithful perseverance. It really never sought to be popular with the world.

Christianity today is not popular with the world. You believe that? Look at how we're being crucified in everything we do. And you know we're on the truth.

You know we're above the target because what they do is they try to destroy it. So you know that the truth is always coming out because that's what they're destroying. So it didn't seek to be accepted to the world.

It didn't try to figure out how to communicate the world, how to be popular. This is not a popular thing. This is not about putting a crown on your head or clothing that makes you popular in your setting.

This is about your life, how you live your life. Although there was a sense in which it was popular, and this is a kind of paradox, if you look at chapter 2 verse 46, it says that they were by day by day continuing with one mind in the temple. So they were in a very public place and they were breaking bread from house to house and taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.

You can just imagine the scene. Every day they're walking from one house to another, teaching for many many hours a day, teaching, breaking bread, having something to eat all along the way, and then they gather in the temple. And they probably read scriptures and have prayer and sing songs or whatever, but that was their daily event.

So as a result of that, in verse 47, they were having favor with all the people. In chapter 3 verse 9, they healed the man. Remember Peter and John? They healed the man going up to the temple.

Okay, so Peter and John did and all the people saw him walking and praising God. And in verse 10, they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the gate called Beautiful at the temple to beg alms. Remember he was lame.

He couldn't walk, okay, and he was sitting at the temple. They were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. So there was no question that people were curious about this group of people.

Okay, think about attraction. If you're living a life separate from everybody else, they're going to take notice. They're going to take notice.

And because you're doing that, you're going to attract all of these people around you that not only need to hear the gospel of Christ, but are going to be in favor with you because you're going to attract those of the same liking around you. You're going to attract who you are. So this produced amazement.

It was clear that something was going on that was unique. There was a kind of power evident on the part of these people. In chapter 4, verse 21, it even says they were all glorifying God for what happened.

For the man was more than 40 years old on whom the miracle of healing had been performed. The people saw power in this group. They were struck by what they were doing.

They were in awe. They were in amazement. In chapter 5, verse 13, it says that they held him in high regard.

They held him in high esteem. So the early church had spiritual integrity. The early church was clearly different.

It was clearly distinct. It wasn't anything like other groups or associations or guilds or cliques, whatever you want to call them. It was completely set apart than those.

They were around in the ancient world. In any area that you went into from the commission of the gospel, you would find the same elements. It had integrity that generated admiration and respect and wonder.

It's kind of what Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 4. When he talks about commending ourselves to every man's conscience, it's certainly what the Apostle Paul told Timothy would be a requirement for a church leader. That would be that he would have a good reputation among those who were outside the church. Now, this is very important because the church is pure enough and cohesive enough to put on a single front that the world could see.

Oneness, oneness, oneness, oneness. But right alongside this respect and right alongside this recognition of the uniqueness of the church, the integrity of the church came resentment. Why? Because you're getting people around you, you're gathering people to your cause, and they're leaving their causes that they typically had supported.

So it's just like anything else that we live today. If you go from one clique to the other clique, what you do is you get persecuted in the clique you left. Okay, same thing today.

Our children have gone through that their entire life, and so did we as we were growing up. Why did I get befriended today? You know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It's the same concept.

So they were in awe of their lives. They were amazed at their character, but they were outright offended by their message. In chapter 2, verse 36, the message clearly given, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, that this Jesus whom you crucified.

People say, well, who's responsible for crucifying Christ? Well, the Jews are, and us. We're the Romans, but the Jewish church is the one who sent them to Rome to be crucified. That's what it says there.

Not only them, but certainly them. And in no uncertain terms, Peter tells them that whom you crucified, the boldness of Peter dealing with the elders of the church, you see the transformation of the apostles. And when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart.

That's what Scripture tells us. And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brethren, what shall we do? In other words, they were convicted. The Holy Spirit convicted them of what they did, and now they want to know what to do.

And Peter said to them, repent, each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the goodness of your sin, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, remember, Peter's talking still to the Jews. He's not talking to the Gentiles yet.

This is not the true gospel that we have today from Paul. This is still the transition process of the Jews getting into the Gentile salvation. In verse 40, with many other words, he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, be saved from this perverse generation.

A very strong message, narrow, exclusive, confrontive, condemning, judgmental. Go over to chapter 3. It stays the same way. Verse 17.

And now, brethren, says Peter, I know you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also, but the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, Old Testament, that is, Christ would suffer, he has thus fulfilled. He's telling you, guys, what you understand of the Old Testament. He's still talking to Jews here.

What you understand of the Old Testament prophecies, they've just been fulfilled in front of your eyes. But you were too blind to see it. You didn't want to see it.

There's Peter showing his grasp for the first time in the Old Testament. Therefore, repent and return so that your sins may be wiped away. You're going to learn something in Ephesians about when we get into the full redemption process, you're going to learn that your sins have been wiped away before the foundation of the world.

Think about that. Again, this message of sin and repentance in the face of judgment was the message that they preached in the early church. It was an offensive message, but it was in your face.

That's exactly what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to confront. It doesn't say pacify or, you know, try to figure out what you need to do to bring society into your church.

It says confrontation, okay? So chapter 4, Peter filled in verse 8 with the Holy Spirit, says rulers and elders of the people, if we're on trial today, being the apostles, for a benefit done to a sick man, remember the man that they healed going up into the temple, the 40-year-old man, as to how this man had been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this name, this man stands here before you in good health. So they're telling the elders, it is through Jesus Christ that they utilize their power from the Holy Spirit to heal the man's soul. Remember, you don't heal it physically, you heal it spiritually, and it's transformed in the physical way.

So what they did is they gave him the gospel and he accepted that he became whole in his spirit. Therefore, his spirit enabled him to be healed physically because he was no longer captive to the sin that made him cripple, and he got up and walked. He is the stone which was rejected by you.

Okay, we're all stones, right? We're all a little stone. Our DNA is a stone, right? That's got our new name on it. He is the stone which was rejected by he being Christ, the builders being us, but which became the chief cornerstone of the church.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. That kind of clarity, conviction, boldness, unflinching narrowness, and faithfulness to the gospel characterized that early church. As close to Christ's death as you get, and as bold as you can become, is once you have experienced all of that stuff in the early church.

We have to believe that history is true, and we've proved that in a number of ways by looking at history. Just looking at history without biblical influence. We've looked at history, compared it to the Bible in some of our first early teachings or discussions in this group, to show you that the Bible is true.

All right, so their lives were remarkable. They were not like any that they had experienced. This was a unique group of people with a kind of love and affliction and generosity and sharing and humility and character that was unheard of.

And while they couldn't help but admire their character—okay, now here's where pride is coming—while they couldn't help admire their character, admire their integrity, they hated their message. This is the people. They hated the message.

The message never changed, ever. The message was offensive. It was narrow.

It was exclusive, and it was condemning, and it pronounced damnation on everyone who rejected Christ. And so what happened was persecution began, okay? It was too far into the Book of Acts—it wasn't too far into the Book of Acts—where we begin to feel the animosity. Matter of fact, you're going to get it pretty early in the Book of Acts.

As soon as the guys went out to preach on the first day, you saw it. Okay, Peter's the one that preached the first sermon after Pentecost, and you can see the persecution right there. They're told not to preach.

Okay, so let's back up on one. The apostles were in prison, okay? They were threatened. They were persecuted.

They're told not to preach. Matter of fact, this is where Stephen gets killed because he's standing in front of the elders the last round of trying to get them to proclaim Christ as their king, and they stone him, and that's where Christ sits down and goes after Paul, okay? So all of this has taken place. And Saul, chapter 8, verse 1, is in hardy agreement, okay? Why is he in hardy agreement? Because he's the one that told him to go stone Stephen.

Think about it. He was still in his old ways. This is the first time we meet Saul, who became Paul, putting him to death, putting him to death, Stephen.

And on that day, a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem. They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea, Samaria, except the apostles. The apostles were together because Christ told them to stay together.

Talks about the burial of Stephen. There has to be, if the church is to grow, a faithful perseverance in the face of hostility that comes against the message. It's always going to be that.

We didn't have that today, okay? We see no difference. Look at just our little group, and look at what's gone on over the course of time within just this little group, okay? So you say, well, you know, if they hate us, isn't that going to kill the church? Go back to chapter 4. I remind you of the very important principle. They were speaking to the people.

The priest and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them. This is the apostles being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people of proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. They admired their life.

They hated their message. So they laid hands on them. They arrested him.

That's what they did. So the Romans came in, laid hands on them, arrested them. They put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening and didn't disperse, but many of those who had heard the message believed, and the number of the men alone came to about 5,000.

Well, that's just men. That's not counting who they would have as women or children. That number probably is somewhere between 15 and 20,000 people in one day.

Now you say, if you had a strategy to win people over, it wouldn't be to infuriate them. Well, it didn't matter. It wouldn't be to condemn them.

It wouldn't be to pronounce judgment on them. It wouldn't be to hold them over hell like Jonathan Edward did in the spider web thread. That just wouldn't be a good strategy, but that's exactly how the early church grew.

They told the truth. They preached the gospel no matter what they felt, because it's not man that converts sinners. It's God that converts the sinners.

We just lay the seed. It grew under the force and power of truth. That's how things grow.

Take any organization out there, okay, that's been good. You can even go back into high school, your high school years. Let's take one.

Let's call it 4-H. All right, let's take Boy Scouts. Boy Scouts was all good because it taught boys to go through adolescence to become young men.

It taught them how to survive. It taught them the ways of life. It gave them the moral standards.

Oh, but what's happened now? They've allowed transgender to come into the mix, and now it's fallen apart because it's not truth anymore. It wouldn't be to hold them over the hell like Jonathan Edwards. It grew under the force of the power of the truth.

The contemporary church notion is that narrowness, path is narrow, hostility, anger, resentment do not lead to the growth of the church. However, they do in the New Testament, because why? It's a transcendent message, and it is the truth. Hostility, narrowness, persecution is not counterproductive to the church.

It is essential to the church growth because it's the natural response of unregenerate people to the truth. The church will not be built by men and clever means and strategies. It's not a cultural thing.

It's not a societal thing. It's just the truth. The church will be built by God through the truth and the hard truth encompassing the warning of final judgment.

They may respect our integrity. They will hate our message. Do we capitulate them? No.

That's the popular way of things to do. We try to bring in what we think the people need, not versus the truth. We want to change our way of the truth to a cultural way of life.

That is Bass Ackwards. When you do that, you open the door up not only for sin to enter into the believer congregation, but you allow the devil to take charge. Why? Because we've opened up the legal door.

We've got away from the truth. Now we have a legal door open. Listen to this.

A quote from Spurgeon, a sermon he did in 1888. This is what he said. The new plan is to assimilate the church to the world and so include a larger area within its bounds.

This is 1888, guys. This is almost 200 years ago, 150 years ago. By semi-dramatic performances.

Oh, what's that? That's entertainment. They make houses of prayer to approximate the theater. They turn their services into musical displays and their sermons into political harangues or philosophical essays, philosophical, psychological essays.

In fact, they exchange the temple for the theater and turn the ministers of God into actors whose business it is to amuse men. It is not so that the Lord's day is becoming more and more of a day of recreation or of idleness. The Lord's house, either a place where there is more enthusiasm for a party than zeal for God.

The hedges are broken down. The walls are leveled and too many there is henceforth no church except as a portion of the world. You've changed the church to the world.

Just exactly what happened to Thyra Tyra. No God except as an unknown force by which the laws of success and happiness work. This then is the proposal.

In order to win the world, the Lord Jesus must conform himself, his people, and his word to the world. That's our thoughts today. That's what they're teaching us.

That's what they're teaching our kids in school. Potentially destructive, actively destructive, deadly to the truth, growth of the church. As we've been seeing in John 6, that kind of stuff just collects false disciples.

So what is the plan? That the Lord has to grow the church in this first generation. That's the prototype for all generations. So that's the reason why we're studying Ephesians because it is the prototype of what we should be doing today as the church.

His church growth plan involves a transcendent message, a regenerate congregation, and a faithful, if not valiant, perseverance to preach the truth boldly no matter what the price. There's a fourth element that comes into play very early in the book of Acts, and it's a principle that I think is essential in the matter of the church growth. It's an evident purity, a manifest purity with so many signs and wonders and miracles attracting people who would come because they were drawn by the signs and by the wonders and the miracles.

There was a serious danger. A very serious danger was the miracle seekers, the people pouring in to tap into the miracles, not the church. I'll think about that today.

We're going to get this in either in the writing of sanctification or in Ephesians, how we're going to look at it. All you want is your blessings. Let me live my life like I want.

Just give me my blessings. That's our voice today. Guys, we've talked about it.

I hear it all the time. I hear it from you. The danger was the miracle seekers, the people pouring in to tap into the miracles.

The church was then in danger of being polluted. Oh my gosh, I can't even think about that. Just continue to tell me about me getting my blessings and let me live my life the only way.

I don't want to be obedient. I think you wonder why in the hell you're going to hell. The church was in danger of being leavened.

Leavened is corruption. When Christ talks about leavened and unleavened bread, leaven is corruption. This had to be dealt with.

That's the reason why we deal with it too. I'm trying to get God to tell me that I can call out individuals. I already talked to you about that.

I'm very protective of feelings. All right. The church had to be protected because the church must be pure.

That's the reason for confrontation is purity. That's the reason why we can't allow other doctrine to be inputted into this group. We have to maintain purity of truth.

How is the church going to be protected? There had to be something very severe, something very dramatic that would happen to tell people how serious God is about purity. It happened in chapter 5. A man named Ananias with his wife, so far. We have sold a piece of property.

We've talked about this, but this is how God put it in their face. You know the story well, kept back some of the price, did so with his wife, full of knowledge, bringing a portion of it later at the apostle's feet. The background is the people were selling goods in order to give money to Christians who needed to be supported.

This was the way to fund the Christians that were being added to the church that were staying in Jerusalem to be taught. Remember that's only one church in Jerusalem made up of people who came to Jerusalem for the Passover, then for Pentecost. So they live somewhere else in another land or another place.

They can't go back because this is the only church. They have no way of learning going home, so they're going to stay in Jerusalem to be taught. These are the only Christians, so they stay.

So they become a burden to society, but people are trying to help that by selling their possessions. Paul goes out and raises money, we've talked about. So they have to be cared for.

So the people are literally selling things, giving things away to support these new believers who are part of the church. Apparently the model was that a man, Ananias and Sapphira, took after a man that previously did it. They wanted the clout.

They wanted to say, look at me. They wanted the society, oh I'm a do-gooder, okay. That's what they went after and that's what they got.

So let's just look at it in total. So they modeled this after a man who sold a tract of land, brought the money, and laid it at the apostle's feet and said, you know, give it to whoever needs it. This wonderful act mentioned in verses 36 and 37, referring to Barnimus, which was the old man, is such a beautiful thing that Ananias and Sapphira went, want to get the same kind of accolades, apparently, that the old man who did it got.

So they decided they're going to sell some property and they're going to declare to to do the same thing. However they make the declaration, they make the pledge, okay. This is what I said before.

They make the pledge to God. They didn't make the pledge to man. Oh and how many times have you told God, oh just get rid of this and I'll do this.

Oh think about this guys, seriously. So they make the pledge and then they keep back some of the price. So they sold it.

They kept some of the price when they said they were going to give it all. They brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostle's feet. Peter said, Ananias, why is Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to give to keep back some of the price of the land? Okay, first off, let's look at this.

How did Peter even know it? Ananias hadn't even opened his mouth, okay. That was the Holy Spirit saying, Peter, pay attention to what I'm fixing to tell you. While it remained unsold, didn't it remain in your own? In other words, you didn't have to do this.

You had it all, but you wanted to pledge this. You wanted a societal accolade by getting up and standing from the church that you're a do-gooder. Oh and let's just show you how do-gooder you are.

You didn't have to sell it. After it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God. Oh, think about you.

Let's just put it in perspective. Think about all the things that you promised to do in all your little situations, that once the situation was over, we'll thank God it was over and you went back and lived your life the way you did without in consideration the promise you made to God. And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last and great fear came over all who heard it.

Now this is in front of the church. God killed him right in front of the church. Not this, not for homosexuality.

This is not for adultery. This is not for fornication. This is not for murder.

This is not for some massive crime that we would categorize as extreme. This is simply saying you are going to give all your money and not doing it. It is about lying.

Death. Okay, so now let's stop. We talked about this in our sickness and disease 14-week process, that death ends in inequity.

Your sin, if not dealt with, ends in some type of death. Maybe not physical, but it's going to be in some type of death. And it seems to be somewhat of a minimal lie because after all, you did give some of it.

Okay, but that wasn't the promise that you made. But any sin, even what might appear to be an insignificant one, literally is worthy of execution. That's scripture.

The wages of sin is death. That's scripture. So the Lord just kills him in front of everybody.

And then in verse 6, the young man got up and covered him up and after carrying him out, they buried him. There elapsed an interval of about three to four hours. They had long services back then.

Okay, three or four hours. They're still going at it. And oh, now comes his wife into the church service.

I can imagine that she had to put makeup on or something, right? She had to, you know, it's one of these late things. I mean, we all get the experience, right? Just kidding ladies, but that really does happen. Oh my gosh, this is going to kill me.

All right, so not knowing what had happened, Peter says, okay, so far I didn't know what happened. All right, so Peter now is talking to the wife. Tell me whether you sold this land for such and such price.

And she said, yes, that was the price. And she lies. Peter said to her, why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? You do not test God.

That's another thing here. Why do you do that? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out as well. Oh my gosh, can you imagine what the facial expression might have been at that moment? And immediately she fell at his feet, breathed her last, and the young man came in and found her dead.

And they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. What a Sunday of declaration. What an incredible Sunday.

Can you just imagine knowing that people were doing all of these things to try to help the new believers because this is the only church, and these two people came in and lied and were killed. Can you imagine what the next Sunday's offering might have been? Okay, but that's obedience. The fear of the Lord was in that place.

They could deduce what was going on. The sin of lying was enough to bring about divine execution, and that's because God wants His church pure. This is the desire of the Lord of the church.

That's why ministers have to remember that they are sanctifying shepherds. Truth, truth tellers. That's the reason why I say all I'm going to do is give you scripture.

I'm going to let the scripture do its work with you, and it's not my opinion, because that's the only way you're going to be sanctified. The trend today is to remove the fear of the Lord. Turn the preacher or teacher into some kind of jokester, funny, clever, sometimes even coarse, familiar with the pop culture, cool, friendly to sinners, inoffensive, but that isn't the pattern in the New Testament that the New Testament establishes.

The church should be a frightening place because it is awesome to come into the presence of God. Let's just think about this. You go into your church, your local church today.

Do you walk through the front door and experience God? No. You experience your culture. You might hear the word of the Lord, and you might shake your head.

You might have a prayer or two. You might do that, but when you walk out of the church, do you feel God walking with you? No. It's an astonishing thing that people were literally executed in the church.

The Lord desires the holiness of his church, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. That's a command. 2 Corinthians 7, you say, well, that's not going to cause church to grow.

That's going to kill the church. Okay, that's not true. We have to confront sin, so we're going to do that, all right? We're going to do just that.

You can't have people going around confronting people with sin. You can't do that. Well, yes, you can.

That's what our job is. That's being accountable one to another by Scripture. You can't publicly declare that people are sinning.

You can't put them out of the church. You'll destroy the place to whom, to which I basically maybe, you know, I don't think that way. Matter of fact, I've even confronted you guys, some of you guys, in that process.

I don't have a choice because that's Scripture, guys. I don't have a choice. It's what Scripture says.

Will that destroy the church? Well, you can drop down to verse 13, and you can see that the believers were all with one accord in Solomon's portico, a section of the temple ground. Believers were all together. None of the rest dared associate with him.

That's an ideal situation. You don't want people who are non-believers comfortable. The church is not a place for sinners, for unbelievers, sorry.

The church is to gather the believers in fellowship with God. You bring unbelievers into the church. You've now opened the door.

They didn't join. However, the people did hold them in high esteem. Again, that's back to the paradox of respect for the character of the church and resentment of the message, and in this case, fear the reality.

You don't think, well, they'll kill the church, but if you look at verse 14, and all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes, meaning thousands of men and women, were constantly added. If you do the right things according to Scripture, providing the truth, creating a purity of setting, God's going to do what he's going to do. Church discipline is a strategy for church growth.

It's exactly what it says. How did that church grow? A transcendent, unchanging message, a regenerate congregation, a faithful, if not valiant, perseverance in the truth, no matter how hard the message was, and no matter what the price they paid for preaching it, and a commitment to manifest purity, righteous, and holiness. If anything should be true of a leader of a church, and we're all leaders, guys, we're all leaders of our own church.

You are the church. It should be that he is sanctifying influence. Okay, this gets into the redemption.

You're saved, you're redeemed, but sanctification starts, and sanctification continues every day of your life, until you're either taken home in death, or through God's return. Otherwise, he doesn't represent Christ at all. Now, there's another element that I would like you to see, that we find in the early sections of Acts, to kind of get us going into the book, and that would be number five, a qualified leadership.

So much leadership is, by example, really two things make up leadership. All right, I want you to, I want to stop here a moment. Leadership in your home, leadership in business, leadership anywhere, are these two elements.

Management 101 in college. One is an example, and the other is instructions, the ability to teach. These are the two components that are really two sides of the same thing.

You teach, and you model what you teach. It's an example and instructions. It's critical in the life of a church that those who are in leadership be qualified.

It's not about personality, and it's not about money. It's not about business sense or skill. It's all about spiritual qualification and sound doctrine.

The church grows under the influence of godly leaders. Your business grows under the influence of godly leaders, or leaders that basically understand what it means to be in leadership in the business. We see this in chapter six.

At this time, while the disciples were increasing in number, again, this thing is exploding. And remember, the lord is building his church his way. The disciples are increasing in number.

What's a disciple? It's a believer who wants to walk closer with god. That's the reason for our discipleship program, okay, is to build people to be walkers closer to god. A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews that would be Jews from outside Jerusalem who have come, as I said, and stayed.

They're complaining that the native Hebrews, the ones from Jerusalem, are cared for, but their widows are being overlooked in the daily serving of food. Okay, something fell through the cracks, so now let's go fix it. The idea, of course, from the Old Testament on was to take care of the widows, and some of them feel they're being overlooked.

Guys, that's not an if. That's a command, all right? And when we, at least the part of it that I get involved with, with any blessings of the future that I may receive, you're going to see in the communities that we're going to build, we're going to have widows at the top. So the Twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, you might think that, oh my gosh, we ought to just go select a person because all we're going to do is just deliver food.

That's what we would think today. What did the apostles think? It's not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables. We got thousands of people, thousands of people that we're instructing.

Imagine now the church is a few months old, and it has no history. So whatever they do, they got to figure it out from scratch, and whatever it is the apostles are responsible for. Okay, now the apostles are responsible for the church, just like the man is responsible for his household.

Same thing. And they've got a massive collection of people to teach, and they would be like Paul. They would teach from house to house, day in and day out, like he did when he refers to that in Acts 20.

They got plenty to do to give instruction, to take care of the spiritual dynamic, which is the foundational part of Christianity. So we can't take over this food problem. Therefore, you got to love this.

Brethren, select from among you seven men. Oh, seven. The act of completeness.

Seven men to serve the food. Seven waiters, basically. Seven dispensers of food.

Seven people who will fulfill this responsibility. Now, what would you think would be their qualifications? Could they just pick up a tray of food and take it somewhere? Think about what we would think today. Oh no, that's not what these guys thought about.

They like people. They're sensitive, generous. No, even this task is qualified in a spiritual way.

Everything we do should be divinely concerned in the spiritual world, not the physical. It must be men of good reputation. That's impeccable in their character.

That's essentially parallel to the qualifications for the elders that develop later in 1st Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. Above reproach, full of the spirit and of wisdom, and put them in charge of this task. You need spiritually minded men because this is going to be a mobilization effort. Okay, when we think of this, we just think, oh, let's just, you know, put, we can even have kids do this.

They can hold trays. They can take trays out. They can do whatever, and they've got to be kind of godly men who can effectively mobilize people and motivate them to do this good end.

We, on the other hand, will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. That's what the apostle says. That's what their roles are.

So they chose Stephen, a man not only full of the spirit, full of wisdom, good reputation, but full of faith. And Philip, Procurius, Nicanor, Timon, Forminus, and Nicholas as proselytes from Antioch, and these they brought before the apostles, and after praying, they laid their hands on them. They had to bless them through the spirit.

They would be kind of the first deacons. These apostles were like the elders, the apostle prophets, being replaced by evangelists, teachers, pastors, who were elders. But in any case, whether you're the teaching apostle or elder, or whether you the serving deacon, spiritual qualifications are critical.

You do not want anybody around you that is not like you. Do not love this world. Be conformed to this world or like anything in it.

You're to be set aside in everything you do. These are critical. The apostles, they have to give themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word, and they will be assisted by men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, all spiritual qualities.

The church doesn't need secular wisdom. It doesn't need corporate strategy. It needs godly leadership.

You say, can you grow church that way? Yes. Go to verse 7. The Word of God kept on spreading, and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. In other words, they were converting Jews.

They penetrated the Jewish priesthood. Obviously, behind all of this is the power of the Holy Spirit. If you do this the right way, you basically give it to the Holy Spirit, and you don't have to worry about it.

Your headaches start by what you select, but this is counter kind of plan to the strategies of the church growth today. Why is it that God uses to build a church? To build His church, what does He use? Well, it's obvious. He uses that transcendent gospel message that never changes, that unalterable message that cannot change, that must not be changed.

The church has to be devoted to the truth. It has to be devoted to worship, to be a worshiping community of people who love the Lord Jesus Christ. It has to be desirous of purity and holiness, meaning resentfulness towards sin.

It has to be uncompromising with the world and with false teaching. It is counter-culture. It is an alien reality consumed with worshiping God.

It must fill the weight and the gravity of identifying with Christ, must be submissive to Him. It must be led by guided leaders who are models of everything they teach. Now, having said that, and we're only just a little ways into the book of Acts, we've established a pattern now, have we not, that's going to flow through the whole book.

These are the things that we're going to see, and nothing has changed even until today. These patterns are still the same, and you're going to get these in our study of Ephesians as well. We're part of a church.

We are the church. We are committed to the gospel message to the ends of the world. We are committed to regenerate congregation, purity, valiant, courageous, bold, perseverance in the truth, even if it means persecution.

We're committed to spiritual leadership. We're living, as it were, the book of Acts in this generation. We're writing our book, our chapter in the whole book of Acts, and we're so thankful that we can see more being raised up to do the same.

That ends the introduction. That sets the stage for our verse-by-verse review. Anything you want to go over, talk about? Suzanne? I just want to briefly say that it really just warms my heart, because the reason I had so much joy on my last week of travels was because Spirit put somebody next to me every single time, or every single conversation, or every single opportunity was all about all of this.

The being surrounded by people of one mind, or even it ended with that tour of the vault with one of the two main gentlemen that founded it, was right there with everything that we talk about in not only the biblical, but also in the geopolitical, and everything. I was just in awe. Everywhere I went, people were mentioning the Bible, or it came back to the studies, or whatever.

So I just feel it's all based in truth right now, and I'm just in awe and so grateful for all of it. So I just wanted to share that. Cool.

Cool. Anybody else have anything, questions, connecting our dots, scripture, whatever? Okay, let's pray, and we'll call it a day. Father, thank you for this morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to get back into your scriptures. Thank you for the truth. Thank you for giving us the guidance associated with us being the church, and what allows your church to grow.

Father, may you open our hearts and minds to this truth, to be able to apply it to our lives singularly, and collectively with others. We ask that basically you overshadow us with not only your protection, but with this truth, so that we may live not only our lives, but basically the lives of a a communical type church, that we may fulfill our responsibilities, not only in society, but in our own lives, living a life of Christ. And we ask all these things in thy name.

All right, guys, I hope you guys have a great...