

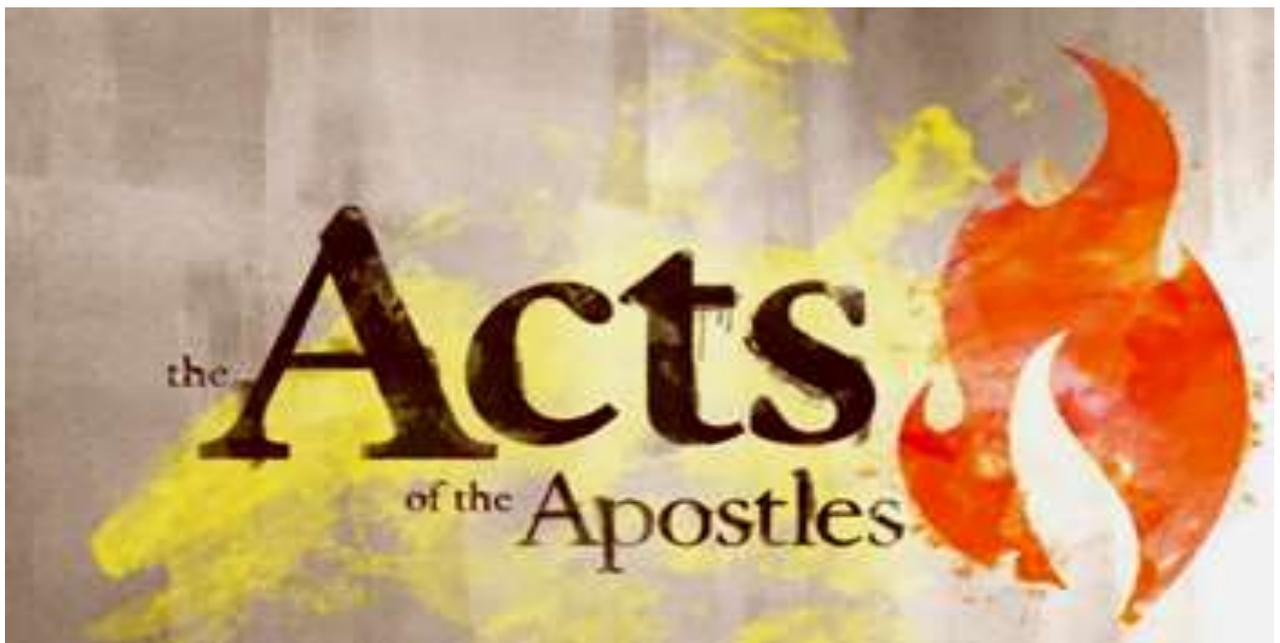
# **BIBLE STUDY MONTH**

## **The Acts of the Apostles**

**Week One**

**1<sup>st</sup> July 2018**

**Acts 3:1-10**



**Rev John Barr**  
**West Epping Uniting Church**

# **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

## **Introduction**

The Acts of the Apostles is an action packed narrative that shares what happened to Jesus' disciples after the resurrection and ascension. While Acts is the fifth book of the New Testament, it was originally written as the second volume in the two-volume set "Luke-Acts".

These volumes were written most likely between 80 and 85 by a companion of the early Christian missionary, Paul. "Theophilus" (to whom Luke and Acts are dedicated – Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1) may have been Luke's patron. Or he may have simply represented persons for whom the books were written.

Acts is the only book in the New Testament considered to be a "history". The growth and development of the early church is chronicled here as its first members wrestled with how to live faithfully as they spread the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ "to the ends of the earth". An important issue here concerned the Christian community becoming predominantly Gentile as it moved away from its roots in Judaism.

Acts includes accounts of Jesus' ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the first martyr, Stephen, the conversion of Paul, the story of Peter and Cornelius, Paul on the Areopagus in Athens and many more incredible stories. Acts also includes accounts of Paul's missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire.

## **Why Study the Acts of the Apostles?**

Acts tells the story of what happened immediately after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It bears witness to the impact of these events on the community and the radical changes that took place in people's lives. Secondly, Acts shows us how the Good News of Jesus spread throughout the Mediterranean world to become a movement that grew beyond the confines of Judaism to embrace the world. Thirdly, Acts bears witness to the remarkable power of God in the wake enormous challenges and harsh persecution.

The stories we encounter in Acts serve to remind us of the importance of faith, obedience and service as the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in a world of confusing philosophies, moral perversion, unscrupulous politics, brutal exploitation and bloodthirsty violence. Such stories are truly relevant to us today as the church faces the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century life!

## Acts 3:1-10

<sup>3</sup>One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup>And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple.

<sup>3</sup>When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. <sup>4</sup>Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." <sup>5</sup>And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.

<sup>6</sup>But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." <sup>7</sup>And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

<sup>8</sup>Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup>All the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup>and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.



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**“THEY WERE FILLED WITH WONDER AND AMAZEMENT  
AT WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM”**

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Sydney-siders will instantly recognise this photo. But when was it taken? Moreover, I wonder if there is anyone here today who remembers the occasion or was even there? It's the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge on the 19th March 1932 some 86 years ago. This event was a momentous occasion as the City of Sydney, once divided, was now united by this massive structure that still attracts onlookers from all over the world.



Now, this second picture was also taken in Sydney. Do you know what occasion it celebrates? Do you remember it and were you there? This man danced along Elizabeth Street 73 years ago. The date was 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945. This incredible occasion concerns the end of the World War Two. The day was greeted with much joy and jubilation as peace finally returned to the Asia-Pacific region.

(2)



This next picture may bring more of us into play. It was 16<sup>th</sup> September 1956 and I, myself, remember this occasion. It's the beginning of something quite significant in Australia as Bruce Gyngell spoke the words *"Good evening, and welcome to television"*. He was speaking from the Channel 9 studios in Willoughby as our lives were changed forever with the introduction of the "box".



We now jump into the next decade. Before a massive crowd of 250,000 people in Washington DC, Martin Luther King delivered a powerful speech that changed a nation. It was 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963 and this speech, known as the I have a dream speech was one of signature moments in the Civil Rights movement that brought freedom and hope to many people.



Do you remember what you were doing on this amazing day? It was 20<sup>th</sup> July 1969 and Neil Armstrong walked in the Moon. As a young 19 year old, I, along with many others, sensed this was a major milestone in human achievement. The world would never be same.

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Now we are into the 1970's and it's the opening of the Sydney Opera House on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1973. Again, this was a momentous occasion as the world was awestruck by this magnificent piece of architecture. Who remembers this occasion? It was 45 years ago!



Of great significance to the Christian community was this grand occasion on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1977. Many of us were around at this time and remember this event. It's the inauguration of the Uniting Church in the Sydney Town Hall.



This next picture represents a thawing of the Cold War that threatened the world with nuclear catastrophe. A truly pivotal event was the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1989 twenty nine years ago. Do you remember this?

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I remember sitting in my lounge room watching this poignant event live on TV. It was the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1990 as President F. W. de Klerk released Nelson Mandela from 27 years in prison. Mandela went on to lead the formation of the new South Africa that inspired the world.



It's now ten years later. Only eighteen years ago. So some of our younger adults may remember this. The whole nation cheered and celebrated when Cathy Freeman won gold at the Sydney Olympics.



Many of you may not recognise this truly historic event that brought hope and liberation to a tiny nation just 500 kilometers to the north of Australia. This is an event close to my heart as the people of East Timor celebrated their independence sixteen years ago on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2002.

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Now we were all around for this occasion as Bishop Michael Curry, primate of the Episcopal Church in the USA and a descendant of African slaves, preached that famous sermon on love during Harry and Meghan's wedding. It was in Windsor Castle on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Curry brought a new vibe to an ancient institution as he shook the world with his passionate address that included quotes from Martin Luther King: *"We must discover the power of love, the power, the redemptive power of love, and when we do that, we will make of this whole world a new world."*

Friends, all of these events, represent significant, decisive moments that have far-reaching and even life-changing impacts on us. Of course, there are many other such events in world history like the time Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg 500 years ago sparking the Reformation, Lt. Gen. John Monash's famous victory at Hamel in France on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1918 that made a significant contribution the ending of the World War One or Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin in 1928 that has made a huge impact on our ability to recover from infections.

These all serve to impact on our lives, make a difference and often change the world forever.

Today, as we set out on our study of the fifth book of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, we encounter the impact and we meet the consequences of the greatest and most profound event that ever happened in world history!

And that is the death, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, the one who we proclaim to be the Christ, the anointed one of God and Saviour of the world.

Now this is a big claim. But I do not wish to underestimate, underrate or trivialise this in any way. The Acts of the Apostles bears witness to the most important events ever. And they do have a profound, far-reaching, life-changing impact on our lives today.

The Acts of the Apostles is actually the second volume of Luke's writings. The first volume, the Gospel of Luke, tells the story of Jesus and it concludes with Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

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Luke's second volume focusses on the impact and the consequences of these momentous events as the Apostles continue the ministry of Jesus, as the church or 'ekklesia' is established and as the Good News of Jesus Christ is spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

The Acts of the Apostles begins with Luke's retelling of the ascension as Jesus' followers await the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit comes and today's reading picks up immediately after Pentecost as Luke narrates the story of the apostle's ministry in Jerusalem.

Peter and John come to the temple. Lying at the magnificent gate is a man who is lame from birth. This man asks for "alms". In other words, the lame man pleads to Peter and John for a handout. He seeks help to support his current condition. The lame man begs for money to tide him through.

But this poor fellow is in for a shock.

Peter and John look intently at the lame man and demand his attention. Expecting something in return, the lame man is rather surprised. "*Silver and gold I have none...*" exclaims Peter. In other words, we have no money to give you!

Now, that's a set-back. But you see, Peter and John have no intention of throwing this lame man a handout. They have no desire to support this lame man in his current condition. Rather, they want to change this man's condition. They wish to see this man's life transformed.

And this takes place in the power of the risen, ascended Jesus.

Peter goes on to exclaim in those famous words: "*silver and gold I have none, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*"

Peter takes the lame man by the right hand and lifts him up. Immediately the man's feet and ankles are made strong. The person who was once lame from birth jumps for joy. In great amazement he enters the temple with Peter and John "*walking and leaping and praising God*". What an incredible scene!



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Friends, this story has a number of profound implications. This story has so much to say to each and every one of us.

Firstly, this healing is not about the lame man's faith and it's not about Peter's ability to heal. The lame man actually doesn't express any faith while Peter, in himself, has nothing to offer. Rather, what's offered, what's gifted to the lame man is the transforming, life changing power of Jesus Christ whose story continues on in the ministry of the apostles.

I find this quite astounding. So often we all feel inadequate and not up to the task. Our faith is weak, our energy levels are low, our vision is hijacked by the complexities and uncertainties of this life.

But these things are really of little consequence. What matters is that God chooses people, people like you and me, to continue God's ministry of healing and hope. God chooses to work through us with God's amazing power - weak, vulnerable and inadequate we may be!

Secondly, this healing speaks about breaking down barriers and crossing boundaries. Peter, in taking the lame man's right hand and lifting him up, breaks all the rules. Peter breaks all the rules because he treats this poor, destitute lame man as an equal. This man is not an object of pity. Rather, he is received as a fellow human being who deserves the right hand of fellowship and all that comes with this.

Moreover, it is in the taking of his hand, it is in his lifting up, that the lame man experiences the healing power of Jesus. And here the man is transformed. No longer is he an outsider. Rather he becomes one of the faithful who attends the temple and its services of prayer.

Friends, here we learn one of the fundamental tenants of being a follower of Jesus. We are called to be there for others, to offer the right hand of fellowship even if it means breaking the rules and, in doing so, we receive such people into the community that is the church.

Friends, this amazing story tells us, that in doing so, in extending the right hand of fellowship, people encounter the healing power of Jesus - and they are made whole!

Thirdly, this healing demonstrates the primary focus of what ministry and mission is to be about. It's not about money and it's not about material resources. It's not about creating wealth and then giving it away. It's not about creating yet another program to make conditions more bearable for others. Rather, the primary mission of the Christian community is about the power of Jesus bringing change and transformation.

Now, this is something we ought to never forget.

My deep concern is that, in some instances, the church today, is focussed on simply making things more bearable for others. The effect here is to prop up the status-quo, maintain existing systems and support the dominant culture of the day.

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But this text is pretty clear. Following Jesus means real change. Following Jesus involves turning things on their head and upsetting the existing order. And this means the present state of things cannot be simply justified, sanctioned or condoned.

Rather, as followers of Jesus we are called to do things differently. We are challenged to do things in ways that are informed by God's unrelenting mercy and compassion, to do things in ways that are grounded in God's incredible grace, to do things in ways that are focused on restoration, healing and making people whole.

The text today concludes with those who witnessed this astounding event being filled *"with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."*

Over the next four Sundays we will continue to explore the Acts of the Apostles. Friends this is a revolutionary, life-changing, transforming story. It speaks about the profound impact of Jesus on those who are challenged by the Good News. It's a story that went on to change the world – and to continually change the world. It simply cannot be ignored!

I pray you will approach the text with these thoughts in mind. And, importantly, I pray that the life-enhancing, life-changing, transformative power of Jesus Christ will touch you as you, too, can stand with that crowd in awesome wonder and in breath-taking amazement.

Amen.



## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DISCUSS:**

- Think about an event in your life that has made a decisive impact. How has your life changed and what does it mean for you now?
  - Read Acts 3:1-10. How does the lame man's life change and what does it mean for him?
  - Peter was able to heal the lame man but how? (verse 6)
  - What does it mean to reach out in the right hand of fellowship and raise someone up? (verse 7)
  - Do we need "silver and gold" to carry out God's mission? Why or why not?
  - How might we express our wonder and amazement with what God is doing?
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## **BIBLE STUDY MONTH - PROGRAM**

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July: Acts 3:1-10:** Preacher: John Barr – The Power of the Gospel: *"Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"*

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July: Acts 4:32-37:** Preacher: Radhika Sukumar-White – Life Together *"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold."*

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July: Acts 9:1-22:** Preacher: John Barr – The Power to Transform: *"and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'"*

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July: Acts 16:16-34:** Preacher: Radhika Sukumar-White – Lives are Changed: *"Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened."*

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July: Acts 17:16-34:** Preacher: John Barr - The God Who is There: *"I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth..."*

**West Epping Uniting Church**  
**Sundays at 8am and 10am**

