

CHARLES KIMBANGI

Welcome back. It's the last week of our series called INVITED. It's been a great series, hasn't it. I hope you've been enjoying going through the daily devotional notes and looking at the book of Acts, and also the Sunday sermons. Today I'm here with Andrew Wilson. It's great to have you here. Andrew's the teaching pastor at King's, and we're going to be looking at the last topic today. Andrew, the book of Acts ends slightly abruptly, but it would be great to hear from you how it ends, and also how it teaches us about diversity.

ANDREW WILSON

In some ways the weird thing about Acts, as you've just said, is that it doesn't end. I think that's the strangeness of it. With letters you end up with a, 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirit. Amen', and with narratives of the Old Testament there's usually a clear end point in the story – in the gospels you have the resurrection – but with Acts you don't, you just kind of get left there. You expect the story to continue – and the whole world became Christian, or they all lived happily ever after, or whatever – and you don't. You just get this scene where Paul is in his home, inviting people, telling people to come and see him, and talking to them about the kingdom. I think there is something very significant about the fact that Acts doesn't end. I think, as many people have said for a long...throughout church history really, that shows us partly that we live in Acts chapter 29, 30, 407, whatever, that we are living in a subsequent part of the same story, and there's a dot-dot-dot which for us to fill in. I think that's part of the way Acts ends, and it also ends, I guess, with this note of hope that the method Paul's using here, of just going from nation after nation, and sitting around with people, and inviting them to come and hear, inviting them to perhaps eat with him, or whatever, and then start talking about the kingdom – that that works, that that's actually something that's not just going to happen in Ephesus and Corinth and Rome, but is going to continue going all over the world until everyone's heard the news about Jesus. I think if you take those two insights together, you end up saying, well, the way Acts ends kind of implies that we are to continue the mission of the early church by continuing to cross cultural borders to speak to people about Jesus, to continue to invite people round to hear about Him, and that that process will continue until the day Jesus comes back. I think that's effectively what we've been trying to do in this series, to say this is us doing that. So I think it's quite a powerful non-ending of an ending, actually.

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So we've looked at what diversity looked like in the early church, in the bible, and we've tried to apply that to the church today. What about the future then? What kind of future hope or vision do we have for diversity, perhaps?

ANDREW WILSON

That's the thing, isn't it. In this series we've mainly been looking back and looking into the present, but looking into the future is wonderful because you realise that the bible, for all that Acts has that dot-dot-dot, question mark, what's going to happen now?, the bible doesn't. The bible ends with...you have Ephesians 1 saying all things in heaven and earth will be united, and you have Romans 8 saying, and creation itself, everybody is going to come liberated out of this bondage to corruption, and you have Revelation 7 saying, then I saw this great multitude that no one could count, gathering around the throne and singing, out of every tribe and tongue and language. And you think, wow, the dot-dot-dot at the end of Acts doesn't mean, we have no idea where this is going; it means, we will get there, and our job is in effect to live out this story. In a sense, I think, the only kind of concern would be if we were to read Acts and do this series, and think, and therefore the end point for us is the establishing of a large, diverse church in south London. You think, well that's wonderful, that's hard enough, that's a huge calling and it's something we're absolutely committed to, but it's not the whole picture because that's very small – that's our drop in the huge ocean of God's plan, to build a diverse church in every nation. And a lot of those nations and tribes and languages don't have a bible, and many of them, about 2,000-odd of them, don't have the gospel at all – they don't have any Christians working among them. Another 4 or 5,000 don't have a self-replicating church that can preach to the whole people group, as it were. So you've got thousands and thousands of communities where there's no viable Christian witness. And our calling is not just to build one here. It's great to have peace and reconciliation and harmony and forgiveness and celebration amongst people, but we're still mostly English-speaking, we still live in the same city – and actually our calling is to extend that invitation to every people group, and to play our part in seeing the word of God reach every last corner of the earth. I think that's an even bigger vision than the one we've been mostly focussing on here. So I think it's exciting to see God will see that done in His sovereignty, but it's also a challenge to us to say we have a big part in seeing that come about.

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This series has been hugely challenging but also a joy to think about these issues. How do we stop it from being just a one-time thing, and how do we keep it in the forefront of our minds as we go about our daily lives?

ANDREW WILSON

This is kind of a question about, how do you apply any Christian teaching on-going, isn't it, rather than when you hear it. James talks about the guy who sees his face in a mirror and then goes away and forgets what it was, forgets what he looks like, and I think there is always that risk. I think, this is not a very spiritual answer, but I think a big part of the way we do that is just through habits. They might take a very small amount of time. They might take no extra time, they might just be a modification of a habit we already have, but I think sometimes the power of a habit in the Christian life, in terms of rooting into ourselves practices that are able to continue living as if this vision is something that is all-consuming for us, is massive. I think we're able to do that by the way we eat, the way we pray, the way we talk, the way we read scripture, the way we interact in church life, both with the people we speak to and sit with when we're here on a Sunday, and the people in groups, and the groups that we join. It's great being in common-interest groups. It's also good sometimes to be with people that you wouldn't necessarily meet. All those sorts of things. Actually there can be just habits and practices that we put into our lives, the people that we invite round, the people to whose houses we go. Not everybody is going to change their lives wholesale with all of those things, of course, but I think if we, with the guidance of the Spirit, are able to see that, yeah, in those areas I think that two or three tweaks of some of the habits in my daily life would really help me continue to keep this vision alive in my life, and to work towards it, that would be huge. And I think you need to hold me to that. I'm saying it to a lot of people but I think I want that to characterise me, and the habits that I have already had to start forming in being part of this church. How am I making sure I'm not just meeting people and interacting with people like me? That probably is a lot of little decisions like that we may need to make, or a couple of significant tweaks to our habits would make a massive difference, and I think that, in God, we will get from here to here, and by the grace of God we'll rejoice as we do, and build a community that's our part of that big story.

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It's a very inspiring vision for the future. Thank you so much for being with me today. It's been a great series, and one of the verses that we've been looking at throughout this series is from Luke 13 verse 29, which says: 'People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.' An incredible verse. I've loved the series. Why don't I just pray for us all, that we would continue to embrace diversity, see many come to faith in Jesus, and to continue to build these godly habits that you've just been talking about. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your salvation plan, thank you that it was your plan right at the beginning to have a group of people that would be yours, and that would worship you. We're so thankful for the gospel going out in Acts. Thank you so much that the gospel crossed many divides, that many people came to know you, and we stand in the good of that today. Thank you so much for your gospel and your grace. And we pray that just as you've now accepted us into your family, we too would learn to love and accept others, even when they're different from us, even when they might say things or do things that are a bit odd. I pray that we would embrace everyone. Help us to just love people, help us to serve people, and we look forward to that future day when all people from all nations will worship you as Lord, King and Saviour. We just pray now for your Holy Spirit to come to fill us all and to change us as we continue to work through these issues of diversity. Help us to continue to learn, help us to continue to grow, and help us to love you more and more so that the body of Christ might be built up. In your glorious name we pray. Amen.