

“His witness to the ends of the earth” (Acts 23:11)

We are on the series of “The Dynamic Love Story,” studying Acts. And this is the final message in this series.

Last three times we looked at what happened after the Pentecost. Peter preached at Pentecost. Repent, take water baptism, receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and added to the church. It’s how the first church in Jerusalem was started. And we see this pattern in Acts again and again, it’s at everywhere in Acts.

The word of God spread out geographically, Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The message of reconciliation grew in power, transcending social, cultural, ethnic and religious barriers. And disciples got new self-identity, Christians, “Christ-ones.” And they formed a community of Christ-ones, which we call a local church. It was not the end. And from that community, new communities were born and multiplied.

## **1. God’s ministry of Reconciliation**

### 2 Cor 5:18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Here is what God has done for reconciliation.

First, incarnation. Jesus, a true God became a human. He had been through weakness and testing, experienced it all – all but the sin. He experienced all the suffering human beings can experience. He experienced poverty, betrayal, and envy from others. He experienced fatigue, thirst, pain and death. He became one with our sin on the cross. He was deserted by God the Father.

Then, adoption. Sinners were redeemed. God’s enemies were forgiven, and welcomed into God’s family as his sons and daughters. They are now heirs of God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness. They now live eternal lives.

But this is just half of the whole story.

God wants to spread this reconciliation, this peace with himself to the whole world. God loves the world.

How? The answer is for us, humans to live with the heart of Jesus. This is realized when every facet of our daily lives represents Jesus.

What did God do for that? The Holy Spirit came. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was released. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit was poured out on humans and the Holy Spirit filled them.

And they went everywhere in the world, and reached every corner of society. They were sent out and lived with Christ's heart, just as Christ was sent from heaven, and lived in this broken world.

Acts shows that when the Spirit of God came and filled up people, they were transformed. They've got the power to reconcile with others. It was impossible, unimaginable, even never wished by human perspective. But it happened, and grew and spread. They've got the power to bring peace to the broken world. Because God loves the world.

## 2. Reconciliation

Reconciliation, *Katallasso*, means to exchange the position with a stranger.

Here I borrow how Dr. Johannes Reimer, great professor for mission studies and intercultural theology explains. There are two persons. A moves toward B. B moves toward A. They move slowly. A gets B' position and B gets A' position. A starts to understand B by being B for a moment. And A and B move back, but they are closer than the original position. And they move again. Their moves become faster. And back and forth, back and forth. They understand each other, apologize and forgive, and accept each other. And finally, they become one team. Reconciliation brings people into unity. It bridges differences, all kinds of differences.

Do you remember, Jesus was not human being? He did exactly what I described now. He came to the human world and became a man like us in every way, without sin. He took our position. He bore our sin, our shame, our guilt, our wounds, our brokenness. And we are given all he had. We became a child of God (Gal 4:6). We became heirs of the kingdom of heaven (Eph 1:11). We became the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).

Because of reconciliation, Jesus and you and I become one team. And we are given his Spirit. The Spirit of God lives in us, transforms us, drives us, moves us, strengthens us, empowers us for, for what? For the ministry of reconciliation! Now we, you and I become Jesus' team, and we are sent to the world as a peace maker, to bring healing, restoration to the broken person, family, society and world.

### 2 Cor 5:15-16

And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Before I came to Jesus and received the reconciliation through his cross, I understood people like the world does. We are divided by race, culture, language, religion, social status, or whatever. We compete each other, hate each other, fight each other and kill each other.

But now because you and I are reconciled with God, we see people like God does. How does God look at people? He loves them, he loves the world so much!

This is the only way how reconciliation comes true in this broken sinful world.

### **3. The Spirit of God makes difference**

Without pouring out of the Holy Spirit, there is no action.

Acts shows human actions in the power of the Spirit of God. Specific methods and styles come and go. But the Holy Spirit never changes because God never changes. And he makes difference.

Acts 1:8, Jesus makes it very clear. The Holy Spirit comes and then he transforms people into the witness to the ends of the world. And they cross the cultural barriers and all kinds of barriers. It's only possible by the power of the Spirit of God.

Paradigms shift, perspectives change, we need the Spirit of God. They are the Spirit-filled-actions. We identify the challenges, problems in our society.

We name issues. We have sound doctrines. We talk about hindrances, make a plan, and develop strategy. Then we take action. And we will do it all by the power of the Spirit of God. If you and I do whatever ministry in the Spirit of God, all our works become Christ-centered. This is the remarkable mark of Spirit-filled-actions.

When the Spirit of God comes into our lives, Jesus will be glorified. And the church is built on Jesus. The church is his body. It must be filled with his Spirit and his mind, and it must act as Jesus does.

What did Jesus come for? He came to reconcile the world to his Father, God. The core of what Jesus did on this earth is for reconciliation and peace. He is the prince of peace. He made impossible possible. He brings people work together as one. He is the unifying factor. Peace and reconciliation are the heart of what Jesus does.

Jesus came and transformed communities into the place of peace or Shalom where people live together in love, in unity, in harmony. The heart of Jesus' ministry is to bring reconciliation and peace into all levels of people's lives, families, societies, and nations.

#### **4. The community of Shalom**

The peace of God. God of peace. That is the culture of Jesus' community. That is the color of the new community. That is the message the church, his body, his witness declares, communicates, demonstrates to the world.

Martin Ruther King Jr said this. True peace is not the absence of conflict. It's the presence of justice. For Hebrew, it's Yahweh Shalom. Shalom is the fullness of God. It's the presence of hope. It's the presence of rightness of the world. Like, every wrong being made right. It's the presence of justice like Martin Ruther King Jr said. It's also more than that. It's the presence of right relationships. It's the presence of wholeness and fullness of God in us, among us.

When Shalom enters the world, things become their natural-self, they come into the fullness of what they were created to be. When we come into God's Shalom, then God's rightness fills the earth. We walk in this Shalom and take Shalom to the world.

The world is crying out for rightness. The world is crying out for truth. The world is crying out for all the wrong to be made right. For goodness to enter the

scene. The church is the agent of God who brings reconciliation and peace of God to this broken world.

## **5. Moving forward with the Spirit and the Word of God**

The Word and the Spirit, they are both indispensable for us to move forward. Acts shows this truth that when we, church, move forward with God's Word and His Spirit, the ministry of reconciliation grows, bears fruits and multiplies.

We need both the Word and the Spirit of God. If we lack either one, it will be difficult for us to move forward. They are like pedals of a bicycle. What if one of the pedals of a bicycle is missing? It is still possible to pedal the bicycle. But it will be difficult. You can't put on speed. There is no power. You can't go up the hills. You will be exhausted before you reach the destination.

Paul moved forward with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Paul was kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word of God in the province of Asia (16:6). Through a vision, God called him to preach the gospel in Macedonia (16:10). Immediately their ministry bore fruit at Philippi. But soon after that, they were severely flogged and thrown into prison (16:22-24).

After they were released, they went to Thessalonica. They preached from the Scripture that Jesus is the Christ. Some believed. But the Jews were jealous. They formed a mob and started a riot in the city. Paul and Silas were almost caught by them, but escaped (17:1-6).

Moving forward with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is not the way to avoid difficulties. On the contrary, you may have to make sacrifices for the sake of the gospel.

Then after that, Paul arrived at Corinth. Crispus, the synagogue ruler and his entire household believed in the Lord. And many of the Corinthians also believed (18:8). Now the experiences in Philippi, and in Thessalonica ran through his mind. Persecution may come to him. The Lord spoke to him what he most needed at the time.

18:9-10 (NKJV)

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”

The reason why we don't have to be afraid. That is not because there won't be any danger in the future. Not because everything goes well. But it is because the Lord is with us.

To move forward with the Holy Spirit and the Word. That is exactly what it means to be with the Lord. The Holy Spirit is always with us. But I need to choose to listen to him, open my heart to him, receive him, move together with him, and let him work through me. Otherwise, what is the point of being with him? The Lord shows His will through his Word. If you don't listen to His Word, don't accept it, don't trust it, how can I go with him?

It is because we move forward with the Holy Spirit and the Word that we know the Lord is with us. So we don't have to be afraid, or remain silent, but we can keep sharing the gospel, the message of reconciliation with God, and speaking about Jesus.

After staying in Ephesus for 2 years, Paul decided in the Spirit, to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. He said, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome” (19:21).

Paul visited churches in Macedonia. He wanted to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost (20:16). So he was in a hurry on his way there. From Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come down to meet him. When they arrived he said to them:

#### 20:22-24

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup> I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.<sup>24</sup> However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

When we go forward by the Word, we don't lose sight of our purpose. We can fulfill our mission. If we go forward by the Holy Spirit, we can run this race to

the end, even though we may face some difficulties. It is because the Holy Spirit knows the difficulties we face, and he is right there with us when we face them.

In Jerusalem, Paul was nearly killed by the Jews. The whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. The commander of the Roman troops took some soldiers and ran down to the crowd. Paul was arrested (21:30-33). The commander ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble, and Paul testified before them. There was a great uproar. The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be killed by them. So he was guarded as a prisoner (22:30, 23:10).

### 23:11

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

The Holy Spirit actually stays so close to us that we can even touch Him. He gives us courage. He strengthens our heart, while we often feel at a loss, weak, discouraged and sink down to the ground. And the Word of the Lord is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path in darkness (Psalm 119:105).

Even if we know the way, if we don't have strength, we can't go forward. Even if we have the courage to go forward, if we don't have a light, we wouldn't know where to go.

It's not so difficult to start the journey with a vision. There may be opposition, or difficulties. But we will rise up and start walking toward the goal, with the vision. If the goal is near, we can finish the race with all our strength and courage. No matter how tired we are, we may encourage ourselves, "The goal is just in front of me! One step after another!" and we can keep going. But if we face difficulties half way through, we may be overwhelmed and lose heart.

When was the time that Paul started his journey to Rome with the clear leading of the Holy Spirit? It was when he was in Ephesus. Where is he now? He is in Jerusalem. In terms of direction, it is totally the opposite direction. And there he faces danger and is nearly killed. Moreover, he is now in prison. "What happens now?" "Can I really go all the way to Rome from here?" "maybe it's pointless to try at this point." But the Lord himself appeared and spoke to

Paul when he almost lost heart, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

Going forward by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. It is to go forward totally trusting this truthful powerful great God. It is to go forward with Him wherever He goes.

Then what happened after that? Paul was put in prison in Caesarea. For two years (24:27).

What would you do if you were in his shoes? If I were him, I would blame God. I would grieve over my misfortune and pity myself. Instead of courage, all I would have would be sighs. To testify for God? What can I say? Even if you believe, you may end up in jail. How powerless God is! Faith? Faith is just a matter of how you look at things. Faith actually has no power. Perhaps these are the things I would think in my head.

What about Paul? After staying in prison for two years, he was brought before king Agrippa as a prisoner. He was interrogated and he said;

#### 26:15, 17-18

“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. <sup>17</sup> I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

He was not grieving over his misfortune, nor appealing to the king’s pity. He wasn’t complaining against those who threw him into prison, nor flattering the king so that he would release him.

He said: Jesus saved me from darkness. He released me from the rule of Satan, and brought me back to God. I was forgiven my sin. I received God’s righteousness. I was made a citizen of the kingdom of God. Now I am with God in His shining glory. And God is inviting every person on this earth to reconcile with him. He is inviting everyone to have peace with Him. I am entrusted this message, and I am sent to speak this message, not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles.

Amazing!!

What could make it possible for him to do it? The Spirit and the Word of God.

After this incident, Paul was sent to Rome as a prisoner with some other prisoners. In Rome, though he had some freedom, he was still a prisoner in chains (28:16-20). What was his everyday life like?

He welcomed all who visited him, and proclaimed the Kingdom of God with all boldness and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (28:31). He was truly the witness of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

What made him walk his journey? The Spirit of God and the Word of God. What made him reach his destination? The Spirit of God and the Word of God.

My dear friends, let me challenge you. Actually this is my challenge every day, every moment. Do you have both pedals? Is the Word of God rooted in you? Is every single word God speaks to you inscribed on your heart? Do you love his word? How much do you thirst for his word? Do you welcome the Spirit of God in your life? Do you allow him fully minister to you and through you at any time in any way? Are you longing to be filled with him for all the time?

#### John 7:37-38

Jesus said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.<sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

#### John 20:21-22

Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."<sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

#### Mark 16:20

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

God walks with us. God shows his will through His Word, leads us, teaches us, encourages us and shapes us. The Spirit of God is with us, He gives us strength, He encourages us and comforts us, He transforms us. So we can move forward, and the work of God will bear fruit. The Dynamic Love Story, It's not about us, but it's all about God.

“Lord, we need your Spirit to enable us to be your witnesses, so that we can in word and deed act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you. May our lives demonstrate generosity, integrity and justice in and through all we do and say.

And Lord, as it is you who brings new life, inspire us to intercede for those who as yet do not know you, that they may hear your voice, see the evidence of you in our lives, respond, repent and put their faith in you.”

(Sheryl Haw, International Director of Micah Grovel Network)

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection

Having finished his third missionary journey, Paul arrived at Jerusalem. Some Jews from the province of Asia started a riot against him, and he was nearly killed, and then he was arrested by the Roman troops. Then, he was chained in prison in Caesarea for two years. Now he was brought before King Agrippa, and he testifies.

1) If you were Paul, what would you talk about? Why?

2) Read Acts 26:9-23.

- What did Paul previously believe? What did he do? Who supported him and how? (vv.9-12)
- He shared his turning point. What was it? (vv.13-15)
- Who spoke to him? What did he hear? (vv.15-18)
- How did he respond? What did it cost him? (vv.19-21)
- On what basis did he talk? What is the main point of his talk? (vv.22-23)

3) What was testified by his talk?

4) How could he keep his conviction of faith and passion for the call in prison for two years? What do you think?

5) What did you learn about how to finish the race?