What Kind of Church Could We Be?

Teaching the Book of Acts

• Acts is the one NT book classified as “History.” May have to overcome the bad odor that history classes have left hovering around that word (names, dates, facts, tests)
• History = story; ancient histories told with purpose of teaching lessons for life. We reach the theology of Acts through the story Acts tells.
• A story involves a number of characters in a meaningful sequence of events, or plot. We get to the teaching or theology of Acts by being drawn into this story.
• Luke as “the first Restorationist” (Tony Ash). Luke writes Acts as if to say: See what God did in the first Christian generation through fallible disciples who put their trust in him and opened themselves to the power of his Spirit; see the fellowship his Spirit brought into being! If we open ourselves to the power of the risen Christ, what kind of church could God make of us, and what could he do through us to advance his redemptive mission?

Who is the main character in the Book of Acts?
• The 12? (chaps. 1–5; Jerusalem)
• The 7? (6:1–9:31; to Samaria)
• Peter? (9:32–12:24; Judea)
• Paul? (12:25–28:31; toward the ends of the earth)
• The Holy Spirit? (from chap. 2:1)
• Jesus the resurrected Lord

—Acts 1:1 “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (RSV, NIV; untranslated NRSV)
—Acts 2:33–34
—cf. 3:6, 16; 4:10–12, 30; 9:5, 17; 16:7
—Parallels between the ministry the Spirit empowers in Jesus (cf. Luke 4:1) and in Jesus’ disciples


The story Acts tells

- Building blocks Luke uses
  1. Episodes (e.g., 1:6–13, 15–26; 2:1–41)
  3. Summaries (e.g., 1:14; 2:41–47; 4:32–35)

- Pentecost as the model of the Spirit’s extension of Jesus’ ministry (ch. 2)
  - Gathering of steadfast disciples (2:1)
  - Act of divine power (2:2–4)
  - Occasion for testimony (2:5–13)
  - Disciples bear witness (2:14–40)
  - Response brings repentance, confession, baptism, and formation and growth of a fellowship of steadfast disciples (2:41–47) — and, later, opposition

- The advance of the saving word of God (4:31; 6:7; 8:4, 14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:49)
  - Ps 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–31 (cf. 13:35)
  - Ps 110:1 in Acts 2:32–36; 5:31
  - Ps 2:1 in Acts 4:25–26 (cf. 13:33)
  - Isa 53:7–8 in Acts 8:32–33
  - Isa 55:3 in Acts 13:34
  - Hab 1:5 in Acts 13:41
  - Progress across geographical boundaries (Acts 1:6–8)
  - Progress in the face of obstacles from outside (e.g., 4:1ff; 5:17ff; 6:11ff; 7:54–8:3; 9:1ff; 12:1ff) and inside the fellowship (e.g., Acts 5:1ff; 6:1ff; 11:1ff; chap.15; 21:17–25)
  - Progress across social boundaries (“Here comes everybody” — men/women, rich/poor, Jews/Gentiles)

- The inspiration of a fellowship. What kind of church could we be?
  - A witnessing church (even in face of rejection; cf. 7:35, 54–60; 28:23–28)
  - A worshiping church (cf. 2:42, 46; 4:23–31; 13:1–3)
  - A welcoming church (cf. chaps. 10–11)
  - A wealth-sharing church (cf. 2:42ff; 4:32ff)
  - A waiting church (cf. 1:6–11)