

Understanding Jesus' Resurrection through the Lens of the Book of Acts (#4)

By Bob Young

The Jesus Story Is a Story of Forgiveness

The Jesus story from the perspective of Acts! What if we did not have the gospels? What would we know about Jesus' resurrection if we depended only on Acts and the letters? What insights could we gain? We are seeking to study afresh the book of Acts, the gospel, the good news of Jesus. This sermon series is a summary of what I saw when I studied Acts. We know these stories—do we really know these stories? The story of Jesus, what does it mean? What did the early church understand? What must we understand?

Thank you for joining me on this journey -- the Jesus story through the eyes of the early church! A quick look over our shoulder at what we have seen. First, the early church knew that the story of Jesus and his resurrection was a death and life matter. They proclaimed the message at the risk of their own life. Second, they went everywhere telling the story. Third, they were not selective in their evangelism. They told the story to the most unlikely—Jewish priests, Samaritans, Gentiles, enemies of their cause.

This summary reminds me that a study of the early chapters of Acts is a study focused on the way the first Christians were obedient, responding to and living out the Easter story, the Jesus story, Jesus' resurrection.

Lesson #4, the fourth truth—the story of Jesus is a forgiveness story. There may be a better word, there may be a modern word that connects with the contemporary world, softens the impact, is less accusatory, helps us feel better about ourselves. But the power of the good news is best brought into focus by making clear that the story of this world without Jesus' resurrection is bad news. The story of Jesus is a continuation of God's forgiveness story for the world, in a world where everyone needs forgiveness. I am not sure how we can tell the gospel story, the story of Jesus, the Easter story, without proclaiming that the story of Jesus is a forgiveness story.

There are other Bible words, perhaps softer words—redemption, reconciliation; there are related words and phrases that seek healthier living, better relationships, and on and on. But the message must not be forgotten. My greatest need must not be overlooked. The Easter story is meaningless without an awareness of sin and separation from God. The importance of the Jesus story in my life depends on my understanding of my need for forgiveness.

Forgive—

- Acts 2:38, Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 5:31, God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.
- Acts 8:22, Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.
- Acts 10:43, All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."
- Acts 13:38, "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Save—

- Acts 2:21, And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'
- Acts 2:40, With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."
- Acts 2:47, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
- Acts 4:12, Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

- Acts 11:14, He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'
- Acts 15:1, Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."
- Acts 15:11, No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."
- Acts 16:17, She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."
- Acts 16:30, He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"
- Acts 16:31, They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

The Easter story is the story of my forgiveness, of your forgiveness. God doing what we could not do for ourselves. A death and life story for everyone, because everyone is need of God, restored relationship.

Let me remind us of the biblical backgrounds, context that was well-known to the first Christians.

- Creator God exists, evidence all around us. There is a God.
- He wants to be recognized, he wants to be known, and he wants to be known as he is, for who he is—holy, loving, just. Recognize him.
- He wants to be revered, worshiped. Respect him.
- He created humankind for relationship, he desires relationship, but the God-human relationship was broken by the entry of sin into the world. He wants us to respond to him.
- He desired restored relationship—reconciliation, redemption, he has acted in Christ, accomplishing a saving uniting work; his gracious action motivates repentance and changed lives; he makes possible restored relationship vertically, and also horizontally.
- He wants us to reflect his glory.

When we tell the story of Jesus, do we help others to see the importance of the message? In my observation, we too often begin in the wrong place, or we begin without establishing basic fundamental truths that make the story important to every person.

No matter how well I live, how good I am, how much I do, how active I am, I need the story of Jesus. I am grateful for the story of Jesus. It is life-saving, it is relationship-building, it orients me for life. I am seeking God so I can share him. I am forgiven to forgive. He saves, he keeps me saved., I seek the salvation of others.

He places me in a safe place, a place where he keeps all of his saved ones. That is the church. That is not the subject of this series, but that is a biblical concept that we human beings have also messed up in a major way. I hope to spend some time focusing on what the Bible says about the nature of the church later this year after we study God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

The story of Jesus is a story of forgiveness: help, hope, and home.