

**Ripples: The Gospel Spreads in the Book of Acts**  
**Overview Themes of the Book of Acts, Part Two:**  
**The Word Spreads (1.8)**

**February 2**

**David Henderson**

Last Sunday we started a new sermon series on the book of Acts that will take us through the spring and the summer all the way up to our fall start up in August

As we said last Sunday, the reason we're zeroing in on the Book of Acts is because sharing our faith is a main focus for us this year, and what better place to look than the story of how the early church grew

We're beginning the series by unfolding five overall themes that shape and drive the whole book. Those will be the focus of the first five Sundays of this series.

The Lord Acts  
 The Word Spreads  
 The Church Thrives  
 The Believers Grow  
 The Kingdom Advances

Then after we cover those we'll walk our way through the book from end to end, noticing how those themes surface through the book. This morning we look at the second theme, which is: The word spreads.

You've likely heard that Eskimos have fifty words for snow. You've also likely heard that that's not true. But it actually is, or something close to it. If not fifty, the Inuits do have a dozens of different words to describe the white stuff in the air.

What's in the air shapes what you talk about. The world you live in, the things you think about, gives shape to the words you use. The indigenous people in the arctic have words for

**qana**, falling snow  
**qanuk** snowflakes  
**kanevvluk** fine snow particles

**aniu** snow on the ground  
**qanikcaq** snow on the ground  
**aput**, snow on the ground

**natquik** drifting snow  
**nevluk** clinging snow

**nutaryuk** fresh fallen snow on the ground  
**muruanek** soft deep fallen snow on the ground  
**qetrar** ice crusted snow on the ground  
**qanisqineq** snow floating on water

**qengaruk** snow bank  
**utvak** snow block  
**navcaq** snow cornice  
**qimuqsuq**, snow drift.

**cellallir** heavy snow  
**pirta** snowstorm  
**pirtepag** severe blizzard

As another example of how what's in the air shapes the things you talk about, and the world you live in shapes the words you use, the Scottish people have dozens of words for that wet stuff in the air

Here are a few of them

**Mizzle**: mist and drizzle  
**Smirr**: A fine rain or drizzle  
**Yillen**: A shower of rain, especially with wind  
**Daggle**: To fall in torrents  
**Uplowsin**: Heaving rain  
**Goselet**: A soaking, drenching, downpour  
**Dreich**: Wet, dull, gloomy, dismal, dreary or any combination of these  
**Stoating**: When it rains so heavily that the drops of rain bounce off the ground  
**Dreep**: Steady but light rainfall.  
**Fret**: A super chilly and damp mist that comes in off the sea.  
**Sump/Plype**: When the rain comes down like a waterfall without warning - a sudden very heavy burst of rainfall.  
**Haar**: The beautifully haunting mist that comes in off the North Sea.  
**Plowetery**: Probably the messiest weather there is, when it's all a bit rainy, grey and miserable outside. It's fun to say though.  
**Oorlich**: a hearty mix of damp, nippy, cold and chilly weather all in one go.  
**Thunder-plump**: A sudden thunderstorm accompanied by thunder and lightning.  
**Gandiegow**: A sudden violent squall bringing rain or sleet.

And if you happen to get caught in any of those, you will end up

**Drookit**: Absolutely drenched

In the same way, when you come to the Book of Acts, one of the fascinating things you discover is that there are, at least by my count, 37 different Greek words that are used to describe the church speaking up about its faith

The world you live in shapes the words you use. If what is in the atmosphere, if what is in the air, works its way into your words, it's clear from reading through the Book of Acts that the spoken word was extraordinarily important to the early church. The thing they focused on and talked about and valued was putting words on their faith.

They understood that speaking up was central to their responsibility as a church sent into the world. Here's a partial list in English of those 37 different words that are used to describe how the church speaks up.

### **The Church**

- asks
- tells
- testifies
- teaches
- trains
- instructs
- explains
- commends
- preaches
- prophesies
- proclaims
- discusses
- shows
- lays out
- sets forth
- demonstrates
- debates
- defends
- reasons
- refutes

Words are at the heart of what the church values and does.

Now, I realize that there may be some of us who preach who may try to see how many of those 37 ways of speaking they can fit into a single message. I'm not going to use any names . . .

One Sunday morning, after a very long and boring sermon the church filed out of the church saying nothing to the preacher and trying to avoid eye contact with him.

In the middle of the line the pastor recognized a man who had left part way through his message and slipped back in just before he finished.

The pastor walked up to the man and asked him where he had gone.

"I – I went to get a haircut," was the reply.

The pastor said, "But why didn't you do that before the service?"

"Because," the man said, "I didn't need one then."

And at the end of the same silent line was a sweet woman who always found *something* positive to say about the sermons. She stopped in front of the pastor and, after a long pause, the woman said, "Well, Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!"

"Wow! Thank you," said the pastor. "Tell me why."

"Well – it reminded me of the Peace of God because it passed all understanding, and it reminded me of the Love of God because it endured forever!"

Just to put things in perspective for those of you who think maybe some of our sermons are a bit too long, or try to accomplish a bit too much, I thought you might appreciate these two moments in the Book of Acts.

The first one happens in the ancient city of Troy near the end of Paul's third missionary journey.

Acts 20.7-12

Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" Then he went upstairs again and after talking until daylight, he left.

Starts to make my sermons seem a tad more reasonable in length.

OK, you think that's bad. Check out this one, from a time when Paul was ministering in Ephesus on the same trip. .

Acts 19.8

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

Last Sunday, looking at the end of the gospel of Luke and the beginning of the book of acts, we heard the words with which Jesus commissioned the church to carry on after he ascended to heaven.

Luke 24.46-49

Jesus said, "It was written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem . . . . **You are witnesses of all these things.**"

And then, echoing that moment in Acts 1.8 Jesus says

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Let me just pause here. What does a witness do? They speak. What does a witness speak about? What they've seen. What they've heard. What they've experienced. And how that has impacted them. Right?

So before we go any further, I want to ask you to take just a moment and bring to mind what you have seen and heard and experienced so this whole idea of the church speaking up doesn't turn into some impersonal idea.

Think about your own life, your own experience of Jesus.

What have you seen? What have you heard? How have you experienced Jesus?

And what has been his impact on your life? What difference has he made in your life?

With that in mind, I'd like to take the time to touch on five overarching conclusions that we can draw as we hear Jesus commission the church to speak up and then watch how that played out over the next thirty years.

(For those of you who are still thinking about how long some of our sermons are, you might appreciate knowing that this started out as a list of *ten* things.)

## Overarching Conclusions

### 1. The first observation: The spoken word is absolutely central to the Christian faith

Here is one of the fascinating things you notice when you read through the Book of Acts in one sitting. The entire establishing and growth and maturing and development and expansion of the early church is summed up using this phrase: “the word of the Lord spread.”

6.7 So the word of God spread.

12.24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

13.49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

19.20 The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

The *word* of the Lord is a shorthand for the entire Christian movement. In the same sort of shorthand, the life of the church centers on the word

Believers gather to hear the word of the Lord 13.44

And so does the role of pastors, who are engaged in what is summed up as

the “ministry of the Word” 6.4

Why is that? Why would “the word of God spreading” be understood to be a good shorthand for the entire Christian enterprise – the church, its gatherings, its worship, its prayer, its service, its mission?

I think this is why.

Because words are absolutely crucial to convey two things: **meaning and love**. The same two things that are at the very heart of the Christian faith.

Words convey meaning. Without words there is no meaning. Words are *teleological*. They explain purpose. Why we’re here.

In his incredible classic book called *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, sociologist Neil Postman, chronicles the way our nation has moved from a word-based society to an image-based society, and everything that has been lost as a result of that move.

He says

Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials.

He says we've lost the ability to understand context, and when you lose the ability to understand context, then you've lost the ability to understand meaning.

We have to have some theory, he says, some vision, some metaphor that holds everything together – *“something within which facts can be organized and patterns discerned”* – in order to make sense of who we are as human beings and why we're here.

If there are no words, there are only images and no captions. And without captions that narrate what is going on in the picture, there is no meaning. We are just left guessing.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. But a picture without a caption, a movie without a dialogue track, a song without lyrics, is worthless as a way to understand meaning. Why was I put here? What is my life about? Without words, who knows?

Then Jesus steps into our baffling life and bewildering world and says, “I am the light of the world.” (John 8.12) and “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14.6). I am the one who gives God's meaning to your existence.

Words convey meaning. They also convey love. Words are relational. They are the one way one being expresses most deeply the depth of their devotion and commitment to the other being. Without words we are left wondering.

Think of the old Stevie Wonder song.

I just called to say I love you  
I just called to say how much I care  
I just called to say I love you  
And I mean it from the bottom of my heart

What do you do when you answer the phone and you don't hear anything from the other end? You hang up. Without words, we are left wondering. Is there a place where I am known and loved? Where I am delighted in and celebrated? Is there a person to whom I am precious and beloved?

Jesus steps into our profound loneliness and isolation as human beings and says, “God loved the people of this world so much that he couldn't help but send his son.” (John 3.16) and “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14.6). I am the one who brings you home to God. (1 Peter 3.18).

A line that is often attributed to St Francis says,

At all times preach the gospel. When necessary, use words.

Some of us hear that and go, “Whew, I’m off the hook.” I can just be a nice person and that will be enough. But Francis would be the first to tell you that isn’t enough. There will always come a time when it is necessary to use words. Yes, we love. Yes, we listen. Yes, we wait till the right time. But there will always come a time when it is time to speak up.

In fact, he himself used words to preach the gospel constantly. He sometimes preached in up to five villages a day, standing on the granary steps or a hay bale, or stepping into a dinner party of the wealthy and speaking.

Duane Liftin, one of my preaching professors who went on to become the president of Wheaton College, said,

It’s simply impossible to preach the Gospel without words. The Gospel is inherently verbal.

The spoken word is absolutely central to the Christian faith.

**2. Here’s the second observation. The story of redemptive history could be described as a conversation between God and the people he created.**

Genesis chapter 1:

In the beginning, God creates the heavens and the earth. He speaks the world into existence. He says, “Let there be light.” And there was light. God speaks. Things come to be. And eventually, on the sixth day, God speaks humanity into existence.

Then as we’re told all through the book of Acts in the speeches that Peter and Paul and the other disciples make, God speaks through the prophets, he speaks through scriptures, and eventually he speaks through his son.

John chapter 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

II Corinthians 4.6

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

The most basic pattern that is set up when we think about God’s dealings with humanity is God speaks and we respond to what he says.



Faith is taking to heart what God says. Listen to all these synonyms for faith in the book of Acts

accepting the message 2.41, 8.14  
 receiving the word of God 11.1  
 honoring the word of the Lord 13.48  
 responding to the message 16.14  
 believing the message 4.4, 15.7

God speaks. The Word goes out. Humanity responds, either rejecting the word or taking him to heart.

Then, starting with chapter 2 of the Book of Acts and the events of the Pentecost, God begins to speak again. This time the word goes out through the church. God speaks to others *through us*. "The word of the Lord spreads."

Isn't that the central miracle of Pentecost? That by the Spirit of God, which can also be translated "the breath of God," God makes it possible for God to speak through the church to the world in a way that they can hear and understand?

### **3. Here's the third observation. The church is expected to speak up about Jesus.**

And that's for two reasons.

First of all, we are *commanded* by God to speak. So sharing our faith is in part a matter of obedience.

Acts 22.15

You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.

We're told to speak up. Sharing our faith is a matter of obedience. But we're also *expected* to speak up.

We won't be able to help ourselves. Sharing our faith will be a matter of the overflow of our hearts. We won't be able to contain ourselves.

Acts 4.20

We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

We talk about what we love. Franki told me about a movie he loves that he thought I should see. Jennie told me about a new favorite restaurant she thought we'd enjoy. Brently sent the Lead Team a link to a debate with Wesley Huff he thought we'd appreciate.

I was telling Sharon's mom recently about the furniture sliders we found that have changed our lives. Ethel and Paul Gould were telling me about a book they both love that they urged me to read. I told a woman recently how amazing my wife is, and how worth getting to know she was.

We can't help it. We talk about what we love.

II Corinthians 4.13

The Scriptures say, "I believed, so I spoke." Our faith is like that too. We believe, and so we speak.

Interestingly, what that implies is that the best way for me to grow in sharing my faith is to grow in my worship life. Does that make sense?

The more words of love come out of our mouths toward God, the more words *about* the love of God will spill out of our mouths toward others.

#### **4. Fourth, the message of the Christian faith that we are called to communicate is not a formula.**

It's fascinating to see how many different ways the message is described and expressed.

It all boils down to who Jesus is and what he did to bring us home to God and why he is worthy of our allegiance, but it's expressed in so many different ways.

The Message of the church to the world is called

The word

the word of God 8.25, 11.1, 13.46, 14.25, 15.35,  
the word of the Lord 15.35, 15.36, 16.6, 16.32, 17.13,  
the whole counsel of God 20.27  
simply the word 8.4, 17.11

The message

of new life 5.20 – of a fresh beginning  
of salvation 11.14, 13.26 – of rescue from captivity to guilt/shame for sin  
of God's grace 14.2, 20.3 – of the undeserved gift of a restored  
relationship with God

The good news 8.25, 14.7, 14.15, 14.21, 20.24 (about Jesus 8.35, 11.20)

the good news of the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ 8.12  
the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all 10.36  
the good news about Jesus and the resurrection 17.18

The Lord – Jesus himself is the message  
 that he is the Lord 28.31  
 that he is the Messiah 8.5  
 that he is the king 17.7  
 that he is the Son of God 9.20  
 that we should turn from our other allegiances and turn to him 26.20  
 and that we should put our in him 24.24

The encouraging thing about that is there's not a certain thing we need to say or a certain way we need to say it to "get it right." We just speak about Jesus, about what we have seen and heard.

The other encouraging thing about that is it says to me that we should adapt our message to whoever we're speaking with. One person might be wrestling with a sense of guilt and shame and they need to hear an invitation to forgiveness. Another person might be trying to find meaning outside of God and they need to be encouraged to enter the kingdom of God and submit to the loving rule of Jesus as king.

There's no one right way to do it. It all boils down to who Jesus is and what he did to bring us home to God and why he is worthy of our allegiance,

**4. Fifth, we should expect that just as some received Jesus and some rejected him during his lifetime, in the same way some will receive our message of Jesus and some will reject it.**

It isn't our job to control how people respond to what we share. It's just our job to speak up and let God do the rest.

The Book of Acts makes it clear that the world will respond to our message in one of two ways – just as it responded to Jesus, the Word of God, in two ways.

Either they will be curious and want to know more.

Acts 17.18-20 as was true of the philosophers in Athens

Some of them asked, "What is this babblers trying to say?"

Then they took him and brought him to a meeting, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean."

Or they will be uninterested or even offended, and they won't want to hear what we have to say. And in some cases, they may even try to silence us to keep us from saying it.

Acts 4.17 as was true with the religious leaders in Jerusalem

But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.

In those situations, the early church sets us a beautiful example – that the thing we can't do is succumb to the world's pressure to keep our mouths shut, to keep quiet.

We have to be motivated by love. We have to be sensitive in our timing. We have to be careful about our words. We have to learn, as Peter urges us in I Peter 3.15, how to share and defend our faith with gentleness and respect.

But, as he also says in that same passage, we are called to revere Christ as Lord. Whether God has us at Purdue or at Westminster Village or at West Side High School or at Subaru, I think that means we are called to express openly our allegiance to him as King even when the world around us would rather we didn't.

Even when the world around us finds ingenious ways to try to keep us quiet, we are called to continue to speak up.

We'll mess up. We'll say things in a way we'll regret.  
At times we'll feel we don't have all the information.  
Sometimes people will respond by taking offense.

But regardless, we are called to continue to speak up.

I remember as a teenager taking a few tennis lessons to improve my serve.

When we got started my instructor watched me hit a few serves, several of which went into the net, and then he stopped me and said.

Don't ever do that again.

Do what?

Hit the ball into the net.

Why?

If it goes over the net, at least it has a chance to go into the service box, and you have a chance to get a point. But if it hits the net, it doesn't. You've automatically lost the point before you ever started. It's always better to hit it long than to hit it into the net.

I think the church in the Book of Acts teaches us a similar lesson.

Don't ever decide just to stop talking. It's always better to speak. We can adjust our message, we can adapt our words to the person or the setting. We can say more or less depending on the level of interest.

When we speak, our words may miss the other person. They may not connect. But if we don't speak, there's no way for the message to be heard at all.

As Paul in Romans 10.14 says,

And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone speaking to them?

In Acts 18.9-10 the Lord Jesus spoke a word of encouragement to Paul that I believe is his word to us as well.

“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you.”

What are the things you fear? What are the things that keep you silent?

“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you.”

It can be scary to open our mouths. We're all afraid at some level that we're going to mess up.

So why do we speak up? We speak up because God loves us, and God loves the person across the table from us just as much as he loves us.

Our friend in school. The woman who lives next to us. The guy who works down the hall. Our family member at the end of the dinner table.

We speak up for the sake of the world.

Why was I put here? What makes sense of my life? What is my life about?

Where I am delighted in and celebrated? Is there a person to whom I am precious and loved?

We have the answer to the questions the world is asking. So

“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you.”

## Notes: Greek words for speaking up in the Book of Acts

*laleo*: speaking, talking 4.1, 9.29  
*lego*: say, tell, ask 13.15, 19.2  
*martureo*: witness to, testify 1.8, 4.33  
*didasko*: teaching 4.2, 11.28, 18.11, 20.20  
*katangelo*: proclaim, declare 4.2, 16.17  
*euangelizo*: share the good news 8.4, 8.25, 11.20, 13.31, 14.15  
*hodegeo*: lead, guide, instruct, teach, explain the scriptures 8.31  
*kerusso*: proclaim, preach, herald 9.20, 20.25  
*sumbibazo*: instruct, show, teach, prove, make a defense 9.22, 19.33  
*parresiazomai*: speaking boldly in the name of Jesus 9.28  
*suzeteo*: debating 9.29  
*parakaleo*: encourage, exhort, admonish 11.23, 13.15  
*parangelo*: command 16.18  
*dialegomai*: discuss, reason, argue 17.2, 17.17, 18.19, 20.7  
*dianoigo*: open thoroughly 17.3  
*paratithemi*: place before, set before 17.3  
*peitho*: persuade, convince 18.4, 28.23  
*diamarturomai*: testify solemnly 18.5, 20.24, 23.11, 28.23  
*katecheo*: instruct, teach 18.25  
*ektithemi*: set forth, explain 18.26, 28.23  
*diakatelegchomai*: vigorously refute 18.28  
*epideiknumi*: show, demonstrate 18.28  
*metapempo*: send for, summon 20.1  
*homileo*: converse, speak, talk 20.11  
*annaggello*: announce, report, declare 20.20  
*noutheteo*: admonish, warn, counsel 20.31  
*aspazomai*: greet 21.19  
*exegeomia*: explain, report 21.19  
*deomai*: beseech, implore 21.39  
*prosphoneo*: call to, address, speak to 21.40  
*phemi*: say, affirm, assert 22.2  
*krazo*: cry out, shout 23.6  
*apologeomia*: make defense, defend 22.1, 25.8  
*phasko*: affirm, assert, claim 25.19  
*epikaleo*: make appeal 25.21  
*apophtheggomai*: declare, utter 26.25  
*proslaleo*: speak with, converse 28.20