

10 The Church

This is the tenth talk outline in The God Story Sermon Series. The related chapters in The God Story book are Chapter 9, *The Church*: The books in the Bible this chapter corresponds with are Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Galatians, James, Jude, 1-3 John.

Teaching Outline

Key aims

To explore how the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church at Pentecost, the ways the Spirit carried the movement of the Church forward into new cultures and countries, the role of the apostles (particularly Paul) and the characteristics of the growing network of churches multiplying and spiraling across the world.

The God Story storytelling method

The God Story Storyteller understands that to teach The God Story effectively a dual teaching method is required. This is the art of teaching in a way that both **unfolds the eternal purposes of God through history and also releases them into personal encounter**. Practically this will mean prayerfully considering in each talk outline what parts you want to 'go deeper' in and what parts you want to mention at a headline level. We trust the Spirit will inspire and guide you to find the right cadence as you aim to give a passionate sweep of the unfolding narrative while also narrowing the focus in certain places to emphasise personal application and encounter.

Key Bible passages

You may want to read a short passage of scripture before you begin your talk. The passages below are the ones we believe are most relevant to this particular talk.

We recommend you choose one of these:

Acts 2

Acts 10

Acts 16

Ephesians 3

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Teaching notes

The notes provided will equip you to understand more of the context and more of the story as you prepare your talk. Generally speaking the talk outline follows the structure of the corresponding chapter in The God Story book. We feel the key sections in the Talk Outline below relate to the main flow of the unfolding scriptural narrative and so we have included key Biblical passages and quotes from The God Story to assist you in this. We recommend using these sections to shape your talk but please choose the parts which you feel are most helpful for your context.

[Continue to the sermon](#) ✓

Introduction

Recap of previous session(s)

God has come to earth, enfleshed in his Son, Jesus Christ. All of the prophecies within the Old Testament, all the themes of The God Story were fulfilled in Jesus. He was the Christ, the Messiah, the King that Israel and the whole world was waiting for. In confident sonship Jesus came announcing, describing and demonstrating the kingdom of God, leading to the ultimate display of God's unfailing love - his death on a Roman cross. Jesus' crucifixion revealed the worst of humanity and the best of God. This is the glory of God - a God who would rather lay down his life and forgive his enemies than seek revenge on them. In his once and for all sacrifice sin was defeated forever. Wondrously, the power of the sacrificial love of Jesus proved stronger than death itself and Jesus rose from the dead victorious. Christ is risen! As Jesus ascended to heaven he commissioned the disciples to take forward the movement of the kingdom of God he had demonstrated to them. But crucially before they did anything Jesus instructed them to wait for the gift the Father promised.

Talk Overview

Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, on the feast of Pentecost the greatest movement the world has ever known was birthed. The Holy Spirit blew through the upper room where the disciples had been waiting and rested upon them like tongues of fire. Nothing would ever be the same again. The Spirit thrust the disciples out onto the streets to proclaim the gospel and as thousands responded to the message of Jesus the church was formed - the kingdom family. From that point on the disciples found themselves stewarding a movement of the Spirit which was bigger and beyond what any of them had ever imagined. The Book of Acts tells us the story of how the gospel movement Jesus had foretold moved from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth. The story of how God's centrepiece, mysterious plan for the world - the Church - was imprinting upon the world a revolution of sacrificial love and holy power.

Talk Outline

Key Teaching Sections

1 Waiting

highlight how the greatest movement the world has even seen started with the word 'wait'

- + **Key verse:** *'Wait . . . 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.'* (Acts 1:8)
- + Describe the Ascension of Jesus and help people imagine the disciples looking into the sky as everything Jesus had prepared them for became a stone cold reality.
- + Explain how Jesus knew (and had demonstrated) only the power of the Holy Spirit would enable the disciples' to fulfil the Great Commission. Human zeal would never accomplish what was going to happen next. Jesus had started a movement but now the Holy Spirit would carry it on. Therefore the disciples first task was the most important - *wait!*

Pentecost (Acts 2)

Encourage people to picture the scene - 10 days after Jesus' command to wait the disciples are still...waiting!

- + **Read Acts 2:** Highlight the main events - wind and fire, all the disciples spoke in different tongues and catapulted onto the streets proclaiming the gospel, Peter's preaching.
- + Important to highlight the divine symmetry of everything that was happening on the day of Pentecost. Another great Jewish feast was now being fulfilled. The vivid symbolism of wind and fire we have identified as manifestations of God's presence throughout the Old Testament confirmed something new was happening.

≡ Key quote

*"The room the disciples were gathered in had been completely broken open by a sovereign move of God. A great prophecy of old had been activated and men and women were undone by the power of the Holy Spirit. God was doing what he had always promised to do: pouring himself out on humankind, bursting from within them....Simply put, Pentecost was the moment the Holy Spirit birthed what we now call the Church."*¹

2 Wind and width

Describe how the wind of God filling the disciples thrust the disciples out of the room and on to the streets to proclaim the gospel.

- *"The power latent in the breath of God moved them from the place they had settled and it would keep moving them for the rest of their lives."*²
- Remember that at Pentecost thousands of Jewish pilgrims returned to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. Explain how they began to hear Galilean men and women speaking in the mother-tongue of the regions they had travelled from. *"Each of us hears them in our native language,"* (Acts 2:8). Emphasise everyone is hearing the intimate language of the Father.
- + **Peter's sermon:** point out that the supernatural nature of this event needed explanation. A leader was needed. Peter stepped up and preached with boldness.
 - Highlight how Peter's sermon was based on the prophecy of Joel 2 declaring how this event was not just history defining for Israel but for the whole world. Further focus on what Peter preached, i.e. he preached Jesus - how his life, death, resurrection and ascension had changed the world and made what was now happening possible, the pouring out of the Spirit on all humankind.
 - **God upon *all* flesh!:** Jesus had told the disciples it was better He returned to heaven so the Spirit could come (John 16:7). What could have been better than God in the flesh? The only answer – God upon all flesh!
 - Emphasise that the authority and anointing resting on Peter's words brought breakthrough - the result? 3000 people repented and were baptised that day.

3 Fire and depth

- + Focus on the new kingdom 'problem' the disciples are faced with. 3000 people have been converted - what will they do with them?
 - Focus on how the disciples did exactly what Jesus did with them. Form them into family.
- + Explain how the fiery baptism the disciples had received would burn up everything in them which was opposed to love. This Christlike love overflowed from their lives, forging the disciples of Jesus together into a family.
- + Teach the meaning of *koinonia*: the Greek word used for 'fellowship'
 - *Koinonia* speaks of a sacred bond, a circle of belonging fostered through a common and shared cause.
- + Highlight how this new Kingdom family was marked by **devotion** - the combination of *sacrificial love* and *whole-hearted commitment*.
- + Read Acts 2:42-47 for a vivid picture of this and the regular practices at the heart of this community.

4 The Church: A prayerful family on mission, surrendered to the Holy Spirit

- + Emphasise in the first chapters of Acts we witness how the Spirit had both a *centrifugal effect* on the disciples propelling them outward to proclaim Jesus and simultaneously a *centripetal effect* binding each new believer *into* this new community. God was alive in this beautiful community and people were added every day! This description of this first Jesus-community helps us develop a simple thesis for how we understand the Church: a prayerful family on mission surrendered to the Holy Spirit.

5 Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 2-7)

Take a moment to help people understand the narrative arc of the book of Acts, i.e. Luke is telling his hearers the story of how what Jesus said was going to happen (Luke 24:46-48, Acts 1:8) actually happened!! His plot-structure follows the trajectory of Jesus' words - Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

≡ Key quote

*"Acts will go on to tell the story of a people so broken open by the Spirit that they will go places their feet have never gone (width) to form families with people they previously have never known (depth), or wanted to know. Luke provides the thrilling account of how a small, persecuted Jerusalem sect will emerge and multiply to become a worldwide phenomenon."*³

- + Describe how The Book of Acts reveals an unstoppable grassroots movement spreading through Jerusalem and the surrounding region expressed primarily through the establishment of small house churches. These Christ-centred communities became a powerful witness to the watching world.
- + Note how this spontaneous nature of 'everyday people' carrying the movement forward was held in harmony with the important work of the apostles. Explain how these men may have lacked worldly wisdom but they embodied the servant-hearted nature of Jesus, loving and establishing the churches on right foundations and moving in powerful signs and wonders (e.g. Acts 3 - Peter and John and the lame man).
- + Emphasise how beyond the original 12 disciples, many more significant men and women rose up as leaders in the early church.
 - In particular highlight Stephen's martyrdom and the effect that it had on the church. *"Stephen's death sparked a wave of persecution towards the early Jesus-followers. The persecution resulted in a great scattering of the early Church but this evil strategy to shut down the Jesus movement in the end only catalysed the next wave of missionary expansion."*⁴

6 Samaria (Acts 8)

Explain how the Samaritans were disputed descendants of the Northern Kingdom and were seen by the Jews as compromisers

- + Retell Philip's visit to Samaria after the persecution of Stephen and the incredible kingdom breakthroughs which take place.
- + Also highlight Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch. Note how a eunuch signified the margins of society but God was chasing him down with 'boundary-transgressing love.'

7 Saul and the Damascus road (Acts 9)

Explain how Saul was a persecutor of the first Christians - a religious fanatic holding strictly to the law. He saw followers of Jesus as an enemy to true Judaism. In Acts 9 Paul is travelling to Damascus to persecute and imprison the Christians there.

- + Describe how Paul is stopped in his tracks by a bright light and the words of Jesus. (Acts 9:1-19)

≡ Key quote

*"Despite his resistance to the works of God, Saul is wanted by God. God's longing love would follow Saul to Damascus without his permission....only a revelation by the Spirit of the Lord could break Saul's fundamentalism. Saul had now 'heard the voice of a crucified God' and it wrecked him. He would never be the same again."*⁵

- + Describe the scene a few days later when Ananais visits Paul and the words God spoke to Ananais describing the assignment upon Paul's life (vs 15). *"Think about how wild this is – Saul the ultra-conservative, nationalistic Jew will become Paul, God's chosen instrument to the Gentiles."*⁶

8 The Gentile pentecost (Acts 10)

Explain how Paul's dramatic conversion has set the scene for the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles but the story shifts back to Peter first. Luke reveals how the Spirit orchestrates a meeting point for Peter with an 'unlikely' new partner - Cornelius, a man of war, bound to the Roman Empire yet a God-fearer who prays and gives to the poor.

- + Describe Peter's life-changing revelation in the form of a trance:

≡ Key quote

*"A revolution had come down from heaven on this sheet and the boundaries of clean and unclean were being completely redrawn. The distinctions of purity that Peter had previously understood, were now being expanded to include not just new food but new people. The table had just got bigger. Much bigger. A new world was being imagined and God had spoken a new word, definitively, to declare it so."*⁷

- + Describe the incredible scene as Peter goes to Cornelius's house and witnesses a Gentile Pentecost as the full force of the Father's love stretches out over *all* humanity. (Acts 10:23-48)

9 Antioch – a new home for the movement (Acts 13:1-3)

Explain how the Gentile Pentecost was too much for some to take in - religious people tried to control it yet the Spirit continued to blow indiscriminately beyond the Jewish boundaries. One of the key places the gospel took root was Antioch.

- + Explain how Antioch was the first place the Jesus followers were called Christians - nickname for 'Christlike ones.' Emphasise how the church here became a key resource hub for gospel.

≡ Key quote

*"This was the first major city outside Jewish territory where Christianity gained a significant foothold. Antioch became a hub for all kinds of Holy Spirit activity. The city's ethnic diversity was reflected in the church and God would use this cosmopolitan city as the ideal launching pad for more kingdom expansion. It was also the perfect place for Paul to be reintroduced into the story."*⁸

- + Point out how Paul after years of wilderness training will be incredibly effective in Antioch and the place from which he will be sent out to further expand the kingdom.

10 Ends of the earth (Acts 14–28)

Explain how from this point, Paul will be the primary figure Luke concentrates the second half of Acts on as the Great Commission continues to unfold.

- + Describe the highlights of the missionary journeys Paul undertakes from this point on:
- + In Paul's first missionary journey, the wind of the Spirit blew him to towns and small cities in Cyprus and Galatia (modern-day Turkey).

≡ Key quote

*"As Paul shared the good news, a sorcerer was blinded, a governor was converted, a lame man was healed and many were filled with the Spirit. The resistance, however, was real. Many Jews responded angrily to Paul's claims of Jesus over and above Moses. Stoned and left for dead, Paul would get up and go again, embodying the love of Jesus in a staggering display of forgiveness and courage."*⁹

- + Years later Paul would travel to Macedonia and, arriving in the Roman colony of Philippi, he would witness all sorts of kingdom breakthroughs - salvation, deliverance, injustice exposed and churches planted.
 - Focus on how what happened in Philippi would be repeated in significant cities like Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens and Ephesus through Paul's ministry.

≡ Key quote

*"Paul and his friends became known as those, 'who have turned the world upside down'. As they followed the Spirit's lead they catalysed wholesale transformation in these cities, rewriting the false narratives which had defined them for far too long. Idols would be exposed, chains would be broken, principalities and powers would be displaced and churches would be planted."*¹⁰

A family of families:

Emphasise the challenges facing the young churches the apostles helped pioneer and establish, *“These new churches would face huge challenges. How could this multicultural, diverse body of churches, spiraling across the Roman Empire, stay true to Jesus and the teachings of the kingdom?”*¹¹

- + Take time to emphasise Paul’s example of Christ-like leadership - how he poured his life out for the churches, embodying the servant-hearted nature of Christ on their behalf and bearing Christ’s suffering in his own body. Explain that when Paul couldn’t get to the churches in person to encourage them he poured over letters, instructing them to keep following Jesus - in all of life! Explain how these letters form a large percentage of the New Testament and their primary aims were to establish the churches in the gospel, their new identity in Christ and empower in mission of the kingdom.

≡ Key quote

*“The challenges were complex and the pressure was intense yet through the revelation of the Spirit Paul had become convinced these young churches, despite all their imperfections, were revealing God’s eternal purposes to the world. The Church was the means through which the multifaceted, kaleidoscopic nature of God’s wisdom and beauty would be displayed to the universe. Paul knew bringing this truth into the open was the reason God had ambushed him that day on the Damascus Road. There has never been any other community or citizenship on the earth like the Church. A people transcending every cultural barrier, joined not by status or nationality, but by belief in a crucified God, Jesus Christ.”*¹²

- + Highlight how Paul’s apostolic grace enabled him to hold together a living network of relationships - knitting together a family of churches, multiple kingdom partnerships - all along teaching them how to love one another, mutually submit to one another and treat one another like the siblings they had become in Christ.

12 Rome (Acts 28:11–30)

Explain how Paul eventually made it to the current day 'centre of civilisation' and the heart of the Gentile world. Rome symbolised the 'ends of the earth.'

≡ Key quote

*"After approximately 30 years and 10,000 miles of travelling Paul had journeyed through Israel, Syria, Asia Minor, Malta, Cyprus, Crete, Macedonia and Italy. But he was not done. Acts reveals the wind of the Spirit would finally blow him all the way to Rome"*¹³

- + Focus on the last verses of Acts (Acts 28:30-31). Encourage people to imagine Paul under house arrest and what would appear to be the locked-down nature of the gospel movement. Yet concentrate on the last line. *"He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance!"* (v.31)

≡ Key quote

*"The open-ended finale to Acts was deliberate. The words of Jesus – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth – had come true. The gospel had made its way into the heart of the empire but it would not stop there. The dream of Trinity before the foundations of the world had come to pass. People from all backgrounds and nations – rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, male and female, master and slave – had been formed in family through the fiery love of the Spirit. Unified around the bread and cup and embodying the sacrificial love of Jesus, nothing could contain the power latent in the kingdom family. A holy temple of living stones had now become the place of God's habitation. The Spirit had found a new home in Jesus' body on the earth."*¹⁴

Questions for Reflection or Further Application

Why don't you ask the Holy Spirit to fill and baptise you afresh right now? How is the community of the Church different from any other community or citizenship that has ever existed? How can the church community I am part of more fully proclaim, embody and demonstrate the kingdom of God to the watching world around us?

Three Sacred Themes

The closing page of each chapter in The God Story book includes a summary shaped around three sacred themes which we believe helps knit the overarching storyline together. Feel free to use this as an extra resource to The God Story Sermon Series if you feel this would be helpful to summarise each talk. You will find this for *The Church* on p.195.

End of sermon

¹ Alain Emerson and Adam Cox, *The God Story; Encountering unfailing love in the unfolding narrative of scripture*; (London, Form SPCK Group 2024), p.176-177

² Ibid, p.178

³ Ibid, p.181

⁴ Ibid, p.183

⁵ Ibid, p.185

⁶ Ibid, p.186

⁷ Ibid, p.187

⁸ Ibid, p.186-187

⁹ Ibid, p.190

¹⁰ Ibid, p.191

¹¹ Ibid, p.191

¹² Ibid, p.191-192

¹³ Ibid, p.192-193

¹⁴ Ibid, p.193

*All Bible passages quoted are taken from NIV unless stated.