


The Early Church as Contrast Community

Session Three
Recharge 2013




Story of Acts

- Jesus continues his mission (1.1)
 - Now by Spirit and through his people
 - Gathering of Israel
 - Branches broken off (Israel) and ingrafted on (Gentiles) [cf. Rom 11.17-21]
 - Acts narrates how God's purpose to incorporate nations into covenant is fulfilled
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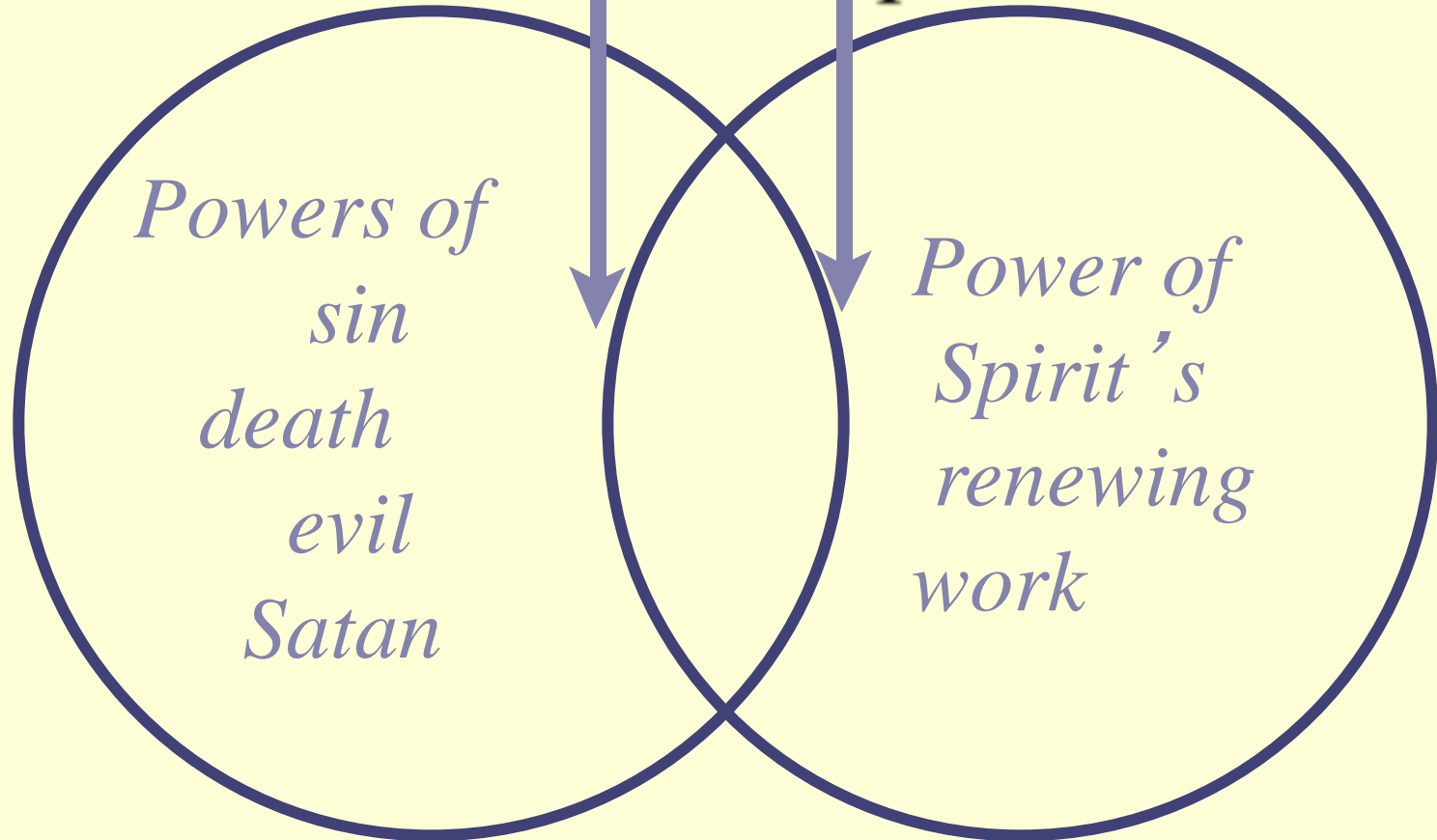


Acts 1.1-11

- Now the kingdom will come, right?
(1.6)
 - Jesus' answer:
 - Already-not yet will continue
- 


New Testament Fulfillment

Messiah Spirit



OLD AGE

AGE TO COME



‘The meaning of this “overlap of the ages” in which we live, the time between the coming of Christ and His coming again, is that it is the time given for the witness of the apostolic Church to the ends of the earth. The end of all things, which has been revealed in Christ, is—so to say—held back until witness has been borne to the whole world concerning the judgment and salvation revealed in Christ. The implication of a true eschatological perspective will be missionary obedience, and the eschatology which does not issue in such obedience is a false eschatology.’

- Lesslie Newbigin






Acts 1.1-11

- Now the kingdom will come, right? (1.6)
- Jesus' answer:
 - Already-not yet will continue
 - You will be my witnesses

‘When the Spirit comes to them and gives them the gift of power, *their very identity* will be transformed into that of witnesses.’ (Guder)





Threefold Witness

Darrell Guder


- Witness in life (being; ‘be the witness’)
- Witness in deeds (doing; ‘do the witness’)
- Witness in words (speaking; ‘say the witness’)

- *Be My Witnesses*, Darrell Guder





Acts 1.1-11

- Now the kingdom will come, right? (1.6)
 - Jesus' answer:
 - Already-not yet will continue
 - You will be my witnesses
 - Gift of Spirit as foretaste of new creation
 - To the ends of the earth
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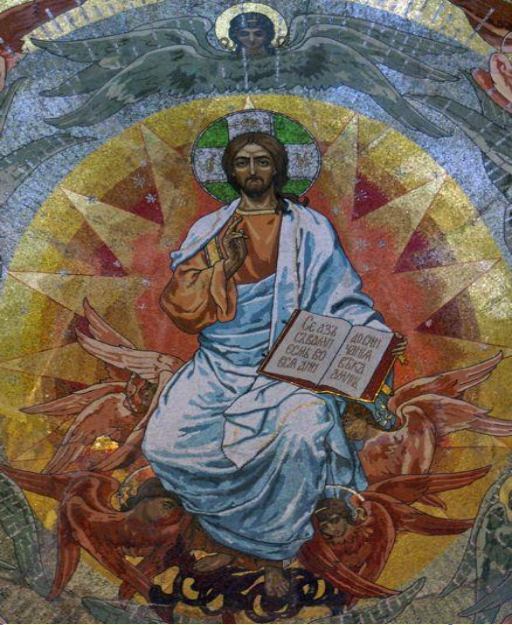


The Spirit Forms Renewed

Israel: Acts 2:42-47

- Devotion to apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer: Celebrating and nourishing kingdom life (v. 42)





ACTS 2.42

Breaking of bread

Prayer

Fellowship

Apostles' teaching


Life of Spirit





The Spirit Forms Renewed


Israel: Acts 2:42-47

- Devotion to apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer: Celebrating and nourishing kingdom life (v. 42)
 - Life of kingdom manifested: Attractive contrast community (v. 43-47)
 - Life of power, radical generosity, communal solidarity, joy
- 




The Spirit Forms Renewed

Israel: Acts 2:42-47

- Devotion to apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer: Celebrating and nourishing kingdom life (v. 42)
 - Life of kingdom manifested: Attractive contrast community (v. 43-47)
 - Lord adds to number (v. 47)
- 




Acts 4.32-34

- Radical generosity: ‘they shared everything they had’ (v. 32)
 - Power of apostolic testimony to resurrection (v. 33)
 - ‘there were no needy persons among them’ (v. 34)
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Church in Antioch

- New thing: Gentile church
 - “The description of the church in Antioch stands significantly in the Acts narrative, as it *both compares and contrasts* with images of the Jerusalem church.” (R. Thompson)
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Compare and Contrast

● Like Jerusalem:

- Evidence of grace of God in attractive and contrast life (v.23)
 - Great number of people believed (v.21)
 - Devoted to the Word of God (v.25-26)
 - Radical generosity (v.29-30)
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Compare and Contrast

- Like Jerusalem
 - Unlike Jerusalem:
 - First multicultural church bound together not by ethnicity but by ‘grace of God’
 - Flexibility, able to respond to new challenges, new situation
 - Mission beyond local area (13.1-3)
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Paul's Pattern

- Pioneer church planting (Rom. 15:23)
 - Three missionary journeys
 - Build them up for faithful witness
 - Visits on journeys
 - Letters
- 



Spontaneous Expansion of Church in Acts

- Attractive contrast life of the community
- Spontaneous evangelism by common members of the church
- Planting new churches


- Roland Allen






Centripetal and centrifugal

There is “permanent value of the image of the two directions of movement—centrifugal and centripetal . . . The church’s mission requires both the individuals and groups who, authorized by God to communicate his message, go out from the community to others, near or far, *and also* the community that manifests God’s presence in its midst by its life together and its relationships to others.” (R. Bauckham)





Jerusalem Council


- New Gentile form emerges in Antioch (Acts 11, 13)
 - Spreads in Paul and Barnabas' journey (Acts 13-14)
 - Crisis: Critical questions about God's people and culture
 - Jewish form of true religion shaped by torah for 1500 years!
 - Divinely established cultural form
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Jerusalem Council: A Church Among the Cultures of the World


‘. . . not even the original, divinely sanctioned culture of God’s elect nation has the right to universalize its particular expression of Christianity.’ (Flemming)

‘. . . one of the great strengths of Christianity in every age has been its adaptability to any culture, the basis of which was hammered out at the Jerusalem Council.’ (Seccombe)






Inhabiting every culture of the world

- Church must now live in every culture of the world
 - Live as contrast community in every culture of world
 - Requires missionary encounter with every culture of world
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Missionary Encounter

In the idea of a ‘missionary encounter’ lies both the call to a positive relation and a critical appraisal. . . . an encounter entails a positive relation to culture by way of a critical approach to culture.
(George Vandervelde)





Continuity and Discontinuity with Old Testament

- Like Israel: Missionary encounter with idolatrous cultures which embrace insight and rejects idolatry
 - Unlike Israel: Sent to live in the midst of the cultures of the world and so becomes a people with many cultural expressions
 - Contextualisation: Yes and no; fulfil and judge
- 





Ending of Acts: 28 and 29?

- Why so abrupt? Loose ends?
- Story of Acts has not ended
- Continues today until Christ returns


... the ending of Acts is truly an opening to the continuing life of the messianic people, as it continues to preach the kingdom and teach the things concerning Jesus both boldly and without hindrance (Johnson).




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- “‘The ends of the earth’ is not, in fact, a reference to Rome. . . . Acts 1:8 anticipates the vast expansion of the mission throughout Acts and beyond . . . The gospel is to spread throughout the entire world. . . . In effect, Luke finishes with the subliminal message, ‘to be continued.’” (B. Rosner)
 - And I add “with you the reader as a participant.”
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A community that continues the witness of the early church

- Eschatological people: A community that experiences the new life of the kingdom
 - Must be nurtured in congregations
 - As wide as creation
 - Attractive life of contrast community
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A community that continues the witness of the early church

- Multicultural people: A community that inhabits all the cultures of humankind
 - Painful tension of living in two stories
 - Yes and no to culture
 - Suffering as result of encounter
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A community that continues the witness of the early church

Witnessing community

- Life, words, and deeds
 - Missions: To the ends of the earth
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