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(Acts 8-12)

Intro. It began just like any other day. It was a beautiful morning & everyone was going about their business on this remote set of islands. Then, off in the distance, a sound of planes began to fill the sky. Suddenly, shots were fired at people & ships. Bombs were dropped as men scrambled to fight back. In a mere two hours, more than 2,400 were killed & over 1,800 were wounded as Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. It’s been said that Japanese Admiral Yamamoto, when he learned the attack had been performed, said, “I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with terrible resolve.” Waking a sleeping giant is not a good idea if the giant is your enemy, but if he’s your friend, then you are glad when he awakens. As we begin a New Year, I want to focus our attention on what we need to do, what needs to be our aim, in hopes that “The Church Awakened” will once again become a giant force. I’ll be reading select passages from Acts 8-12.

Theme: Vision & ministry

Background: The Book of Acts is Luke’s 2nd volume, following his Gospel account. Though Jesus died & rose again, it wasn’t the end of the story (kind of like watching a Star Wars movie—there’s another sequel or two coming). Jesus also ascended to heaven, promising to return & promising His disciples the power of the Holy Spirit to empower them to be effective witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria & the ends of the world. The first 7 chapters of Acts cover a few years, but the church has largely fallen asleep on its mission, because it never moved beyond Jerusalem. With the persecution & stoning of Stephen, the church scattered & took the gospel with them through Judea & Samaria & eventually parts of the rest of the world.

- As we begin a New Year, I want you to see what “The Church Awakened” looks like & call you to incorporate these features into your life:

1. **The Church Awakened Depends on the Holy Spirit (1:8; 9:31)**

- If we aren’t careful, we begin reading in the middle of a book & forget what has already taken place up to that point—the success of the disciples & the church to multiply & advance the gospel was due to the fact the church was fully dependent on the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus promised just before ascending into heaven.

Illus: From the moment we enter into this world, we learn to become dependent on others—a mother to feed us, a father to provide for us, teachers to instruct us, police officers to help keep us safe, etc. As we get older, we often try to be independent, but the child of God should grow to be more dependent on the Lord, because without Him, we can do nothing

2. **The Church Awakened Shares Christ with Unbelievers (8:4-5, 12, 14, 25)**

- Immediately after the believers scatter, they go to Samaria to the north & begin sharing the good news of Jesus—they did this because it was natural to them; they had been sharing Jesus in Jerusalem, but now they were sharing Christ to those outside Jerusalem, those who needed this same hope

Illus: Our biggest challenge at Sweetwater is sharing Christ with others through relationships & conversations about the gospel. Very few of us think about our responsibility in talking to others about the Lord & inviting them to gather with believers. Whether you use the TrueLife cards or some other method, let’s wake up out of our slumber & share Christ with unbelievers.

3. **The Church Awakened Expands to New Areas (8:1-11:30)**

- As you read through the Book of Acts, you find the church was persecuted & began to scatter to new areas—Judea & Samaria, including the great future mission-church of Antioch

- While we have yet to see it come to fruition, I believe the Lord wants us to expand to new areas in what most call multi-site. I believe there are great opportunities in places like North Apopka & Sanford/Lake Mary & elsewhere where large pockets of people aren't being reached in our backyard. But I need your help to reach new areas.

Illus: No successful general pulls off victory by himself, but he has a number of commanding officers under him & soldiers who carry out the task—too many churches sit back & expect pastors to do what the whole church is called to do—I need you & your support & your work to do what Christ has called our church to do

4. **The Church Awakened Gives to Meet Needs (11:27-30)**

- It would have been extremely easy for Antioch to focus on their own needs as a new church (wanting to start new ministries, hire new staff, build more buildings), but they gave to help reach Jerusalem, because they understood the gospel was to the Jew first

Illus: I'm so thankful our church has often been a leader in this arena, for we are among the biggest givers in Greater Orlando & throughout Florida & our own SBC—what concerns me, however, is that much of the benevolent offering is given by a handful of people—the 25-55 year old generations need to wake up to the needs of others

Illus: While we often think about giving as monetary, it can also be in giving time & talent. This year we are promoting something we're calling "Serve24" where everyone finds ways to serve outside their normal patterns for 24 hours—not consecutively, but maybe 12, 2-hour long projects or anything which adds up to 24

5. **The Church Awakened Doesn't Let the Government Stop Their Mission (12:1-25)**

- Whether faced with the persecution & martyrdom of Stephen & the leaders of the Jerusalem Church (8:1-3, 12:1-5), the word of God still increased & multiplied (12:24)
- When Paul performed missionary work, he never let his imprisonments stop him from sharing the gospel (Acts 16; 28; Philippians 1:12-18; 2 Timothy 4:2)

Illus: Christianity in America has been pampered most of our country's existence, but in the last few years, we have seen vast changes in our country & tests against Christian values—we can either continue to become more silent or be faithful in spreading the gospel, focusing on the truth claims of Christianity—we have the answers to the world's problems but we've been hiding them for fear of not being liked or being persecuted for our beliefs—guess what? Christianity is being attacked whether we speak up or not, so let's do what the Lord has called us to do & deal with whatever consequences we face—we may be persecuted, but if we are faithful to the Lord, that's all that really matters

Conc. December 7, 1941 has gone down in history as the turning point of the 20th century.

Although Germany may have been defeated by Russia without the help of the U.S., it would have taken several more years & Europe would have looked much different. Moreover, much of Southeast Asia would have been overthrown by the Japanese. The attack on Pearl Harbor not only awakened a sleeping giant, but the following years proved to the world that the United States was the strongest nation on earth & our country experienced great prosperity. Whether America keeps slipping, as in recent years, or rebounds—that should not be our greatest concern. Our greatest concern is to wake up & act on what the Lord has called us to do—depend on the Holy Spirit, share the gospel with unbelievers, expand to new areas, give to meet needs & not let the government stop our mission. That begins with a life surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ through repentance & faith. Will you surrender to Him today? If you have surrendered to Him, **will you wake up** & act on what the Lord has called us to do?