



Exploring God's Love through the Bible
Decision Time: A look at Acts of the Apostles
Jan 1, 2017, Happy New Year!

Text: Acts 1:1-14

- **Happy New Year!**
- Today, CRCC enters year 20 of this ministry. How grateful I am to Christ for the longevity of the church, and the honor to serve it.
- We've come a long way, from the young, loud, pragmatic hip hop church we were at the start, to the hopefully maturing, Sola Scriptura, Sola Christus church that in its pursuit of souls, will not compromise **holiness**.
- God, who is rich in mercy, decided to teach us His Word over the last 20 years. And He has consistently called us, CRCC, *to make the decision* to follow Him regardless of the cost.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS...THE CALL OF GOD

1. We know that salvation is of the Lord and that He alone saves. But there is no question that the saved much activate their "will to work" and **decide** to take up their cross, and follow Jesus.
2. In other words, there is some element of *volition* involved from man in pursuit of Jesus. From the Old Testament to the New, this is the *Call of God*:

Deu 30:19 *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore **choose** life, that both thou and thy seed may live:*

Jos 24:15 *And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, **choose** you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

Mat 16:24 *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **If** any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Joh 14:15 *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

1 Jn 2:3-4 *And hereby we do know that we know him, **if** we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Lk 6:46-49 *And **why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever** cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and **doeth** them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.*

The songwriter wrote, "I have decided, to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back. Though none go with me, I still will follow. My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus. The world behind me, the cross before me. No turning back, no turning back." Amen!

DECISION TIME: A LOOK AT ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

1. The sacred Text for today narrates the birth of the Lord's **Church**. There in the upper room, in the environment of love and unity (1:14), the promised power (1:8) falls:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

2. Built upon Jesus Christ as Rock (Matt 16:18) and Chief Cornerstone (Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6-7), the gates of Hell cannot prevail against the Lord's true Church! (Matt 16:18)
3. Upon this "Church" (from the Greek, *Ekklēsia*, literally "ones who are called out") falls the duty of communicating and living out the Gospel of Jesus to and before the whole world (Matt 28:18-20).
4. The Webster 1828 Dictionary defines *Church* as, "A house consecrated to the worship of God, among Christians; the Lord's house. This seems to be the original meaning of the word. The Greek, to call out or call together, denotes an assembly or collection."

I submit that the very nature of the Church (**called** out, in constant **conflict** with the gates of hell, and **consecrated** unto holiness for the Lord's use) ensures
"Decision Times" until the Lord returns!

5. The Lord taught as much in the Gospels (Matt 10:32-33; Luke 9:23-26), and we see this truth through the Acts of the Apostles. Immediately, the church had to make some **decisions**:
 - Heckled by the crowd for speaking, being filled with the Spirit, Peter **decided** to stand up and preach Christ instead of shrinking back (Acts 2:5-36)! Many were "pricked in their heart and asked, "What shall we do?" Three thousand people were saved and revival broke out (Acts 2:27-27)!
 - Arrested by religious leaders, Peter and John **decided** to keep preaching: "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)
 - After the High Priest and Sadducees rose up and put the apostles into prison, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and told them to "Go, stand, and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Their **decision** was evident in their actions (Acts 5:17-32) and their reply: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (5:29b)
 - In Acts 6, Stephen, a man "full of faith and power" who did "great wonders and miracles among the people," was arrested and falsely accused. He **decided** to preach the counsel of God to them (Acts 7). They killed him for it.
 - As the persecution intensified under Saul, the scattered church made the **decision** to keep preaching wherever they went (Acts 8)!

- After his dramatic conversion, Saul's (now Paul) life was immediately in danger. He **decided** to preach anyway (Acts 9:23-31)!
- After hard preaching in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were persecuted and expelled (Acts 13:42-52). Amazingly, folks were saved anyway (v48). Paul and Barnabas **decided** to shake the dust off their feet and have joy!
- They **decided** to keep preaching at Iconium where they discovered a plot to stone them, so they fled (Acts 14:5-6). They then **decided** to preach in Lystra, where Paul was in fact brutally stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20)!
- After going to Derbe, they, amazingly, **decided** to GO BACK to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to "confirm the souls of the disciples and exhort them to continue in the faith." They preached "that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God!" (Acts 14:20-22)

6. Friends, time prevents looking at more decisions in Acts, but prayerfully you get the idea. The Lord's Church will continually be put in positions where we must DECIDE to follow and preach Christ, regardless of the cost! And there will be a cost!

DECISION TIME FOR CRCC

- Thirteen years ago or so, we had to decide if walking through Scripture line by line, although not popular and "marketing friendly," was what God wanted, that we might know His **mind** for us (Php 2:5). *We paid a price for that decision.*
- Around year ten, we had to decide if *Jesus was Enough*. *We paid a price for that decision.*
- We had to decide if both Law and Gospel should be preached in evangelism, the Law pricking the heart of man, and the Gospel mending the broken heart. *We paid a price for that decision.*
- We had to decide if God's Word concerning manhood and male headship was true. Although there was initial acceptance and exuberance, *we paid a price for that decision.*
- We had to decide if our families and children were worth reorienting life and ministry to disciple them and worship alongside them (family integration). *We paid a price for that decision.*
- We had to decide if God's Word concerning womanhood, although extremely counter to culture, was true. *We are still paying a price for that decision.*

At each growth stage in this "Pattern House," **God called for a decision.** Friends, deciding to follow Jesus, that His Word is true and obeying it, and to love Him more than anything or anyone else, has a price!

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27-33)

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Ultimately, what God is asking is this: CRCC, are you willing to humbly trust my Word and conform this ministry to my Precepts in love?

The unfolding narrative of God's love shifts a bit in the Epistles. God continues to declare His love for us even as, through the Apostles, God instructs us how He wants to be loved in the Church.

Precious friends, please don't forget how BEAUTIFUL the Church is as she reflects the glory of her Master:

- The Beauty of Honoring the Lord's Day
- The Beauty of Discipling our Children
- The Beauty of being Accountable to a small group of saved sinners
- The Beauty of using resources for His Glory
- The Beauty of Reaching out to others with the Whole Gospel
- The Beauty of Serving one another and the Community
- The Beauty of becoming a true Family, enjoying times of fellowship and hospitality and love
- The Beauty of seeing God's Word as Sufficient for Life and Ministry Practice
- The Beauty of Walking through Scripture to behold the purity and Love of the Lord
- The Beauty of biblical Marriage and Singleness and Manhood and Womanhood
- The Beauty of forgiveness and mercy and walking with each other through difficulties
- The Beauty of Word-driven prayer and Scripture-regulated Worship and Preaching

CRCC, as we continue to humble ourselves, recognizing that any price we pay should be counted as joy (Acts 5:41; Jam 1:2), may we continue to decide to follow Jesus and to **love** His ways.

May we, like Stephen, gaze into heaven when times get hard because of the testimony of our Lord, and because of the vision therein, pay whatever price is necessary for faithfulness and fidelity to Him.

And may we, because of our **brokenness** before Christ, experience such times:

Act 3:19 *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;*

Act 9:31 *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*

Amen.