

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - Motives Matter

Sermon Text - Acts 8:5-25

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction

"He stepped down to his people, bringing grace without equal, The Word of God who took on flesh and bore our sin and death, He is our righteousness" Such powerful lyrics! Folks, as we're going to see today, it's all about Jesus, "He is our righteousness! He stepped down to His people bringing grace without equal. The Word of God who took on flesh and bore our sin and death!" At Northshore Church we've always tried to keep Jesus front and center of everything. That's God the Father's will! And why we do what we do as a church in the Name of Jesus truly matters. Motives matter. They always will. Let's pray and I'll explain why this is so important as we continue looking at the book of Acts and God's plan for His church! Let's pray...

I'm going to do things a little differently today. I've never claimed to be able to preach like Jesus, but this message will be in the style of Jesus. I'm going to have a conversation with you and quote Scripture to explain what I'm trying to say. So just know, I don't have this broken down into points and subpoints. It's a conversation. With this in mind, I'm not going to start with our main text because I want to first show you why motives mattered so much in the New Testament Church and why it matters in our church. Why we do what we do must be rooted and always based on who Jesus was and what Jesus did. If we get that wrong, God will no longer bless our church. If we get our eyes on a man, or on a particular way of doing things rather than following God's precious Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, then we will no longer have the blessing of God on our ministry. Jesus was trying so hard to show the religious leaders of His day how they had gotten their eyes off The Lord, and were following the law and tradition. The same Philip that will be in our text for today in the book of Acts was involved in this event in Jesus' life in the book of John. Listen...

John 12:17 Now the crowd that was with him (Jesus) when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.

John 12:18 Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.

John 12:19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

John 12:20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.

John 12:21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."

John 12:22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

John 12:23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

John 12:24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

John 12:25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

In other words, if you are willing to turn your back on the ways of this world, which put self and pleasure and acquiring things and power, above God and others, if you are willing to hate those things and replace them with love for Jesus and His ways, you will find life eternal! Amen? Amen! Jesus explains...

John 12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

John 12:27 "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

John 12:28 Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

John 12:29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

John 12:30 Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine.

John 12:31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

John 12:33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

And while Jesus was talking about being lifted up on the cross to draw people to Himself so that He could save them, we need to continue preaching the message that Jesus was lifted up on an old rugged cross in order save anyone who would call upon His Name. And we need to continue lifting Jesus in honor and praise with the lives we live, keeping Jesus as the center of our lives and our church! In fact, Jesus would go on to say this...

John 12:44 Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.

John 12:45 The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

John 12:46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

Folks, Jesus was God incarnate, God taking on human flesh that we might see His heart, and know Him personally! Jesus was God stooping down, reaching down, to save the world. Let me just say that the concept of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, is a divine mystery that I will never completely understand. The three persons of the Holy Trinity, three yet one. And while the word trinity is not found in the Bible, the concept is repeated over and over again, so great theologians of the past put a name to the doctrine, the blessed and Holy Trinity! The divinity of Jesus is found in the fact that He pre existed before His birth in Bethlehem. John put it this way...

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:2 He was with God in the beginning.

John 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

John 1:4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

John 1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And then down in verse ten he says this about Jesus...

John 1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

John 1:11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

John 1:13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'")

John 1:16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

God's Word couldn't be more clear. And while I can't fully understand how this can be, I don't have to understand something for it to be true! In fact, I'm finite and will never be able to fully understand or comprehend everything about our awesome, almighty, glorious God. He's infinite and way bigger than my little brain could ever grasp! Listen to this interaction between Philip and Jesus...

John 14:8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

John 14:9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

John 14:10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Now I hope this establishes why Jesus is front and center at Northshore Church. Not a man, not tradition, not our plans and will, but the will of God, the purpose of God, and the direction of God! God uses people, and Godly leaders to guide us, but I say to you, the same thing Paul said...

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

So don't put your eyes on a man, put your eyes on Jesus! While Jay and I were the church planters who started Northshore Church, the church is not ours and has never belonged to us! It's God's church. We were given a huge responsibility to shepherd and guide the church, and we've sought to do so under the direction and leadership of Jesus and His precious Holy Spirit! We are simply undershepherds under Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd! And if I could please ask a big favor of you all? Please, please, remember when we do get our new pastor, that he doesn't need to fill my shoes, he needs to fill the shoes that God has given him to fill. And remember this. God's Words says...

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

See, it's all about Our Lord God! So please remember the important question is: What would Jesus do, not what would Pastor Larry do! Again, I hope I've been a good example of Jesus, but I'm not perfect and my way of doing things is not the only method of serving the Lord and reaching people for Jesus! The motive behind the method and the leadership of The Holy Spirit through Scripture is what matters! Why does this matter so much? Turn with me to Acts 8:5 and we'll see...

Acts 8:5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

Acts 8:6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

Acts 8:7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

Acts 8:8 So there was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,

Acts 8:10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power."

Acts 8:11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 8:13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Acts 8:14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

Acts 8:15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,

Acts 8:16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now I want you to see this: While it says Simon believed and was baptized, we will see that motives matter. We are going to see that Baptism without a personal relationship with Jesus

through the Holy Spirit will not save a person. Baptism is an outward expression of an inward experience. And if a person has no personal relationship with Jesus in their heart, then they are going through the motions of ritual, and ritual that is not based on a relationship loses its meaning. In fact, we see in this passage that Baptism finds its fullest meaning once a person establishes a personal relationship with Jesus and allows Him to come into their hearts and lives by way of The Holy Spirit. Listen to what happened next...

Acts 8:17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

You see, it's one thing to believe about God, it's quite another to believe in God by yielding your life to God by calling upon the Name of the Lord and allowing The Holy Spirit to enter your heart and life.

Paul put it this way in the book of Romans...

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Romans 10:11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Romans 10:12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Now, I want you to see what happens next and you'll see why motives matter so much...

Acts 8:18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money

Acts 8:19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!

Acts 8:21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

Acts 8:22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

Acts 8:23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Acts 8:24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

Folks, motives matter. You see, if Jay and I had started Northshore Church for our own personal gain, or for any other reason than to see people come to Jesus for salvation, become fully devoted followers of Jesus, and to bring honor and glory to God by building His Kingdom, then I don't think God would have blessed us like He has! Oh we're not perfect and have made our share of mistakes along the way, but our hearts truly beat for The Lord and for His Church! You see, Simon the magician was looking for a new magic to be used for personal gain and personal power over others! He wanted to be able to work miracles but for all the wrong

reasons! Unfortunately there are still plenty of people like Simon the sorcerer in the world today! Watch out for counterfeits. Paul gives this wisdom in his second letter to the Church at Corinth...

2 Cor 11:14 ... for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

2 Cor 11:15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Jesus said...

Mat 7:22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

Mat 7:23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Notice they said we did these things "in your name" not by your name! Just because it's done in Jesus name doesn't mean it originated with Jesus! So our motives really do matter. And let me pose this question...What is God's motive for performing a miracle? If God works a miracle in your life I believe it is for these three reasons...

To reveal His love for you, To lead you to know Him personally, To help you fulfill His purpose for you in your life

Listen to the miracle God provided the Psalmist King David...

Psa 40:1 For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.

Psa 40:2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

Psa 40:3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

Psa 40:4 Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

Psa 40:5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

David had come to a place of genuine repentance for his sins and prayed this prayer...

Psalm 25:4 Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.

Psalm 25:5 Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

Psalm 25:6 Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.

Psalm 25:7 Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.

Psalm 25:8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

Psalm 25:9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

Psalm 25:10 All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

Psalm 25:11 For the sake of your name, LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

Psalm 25:12 Who, then, are those who fear the LORD? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.

What is your motivation for wanting a miracle from God in your life? Is it personal gain, a personal goal, or personal glory? It is one thing for a follower of God to ask God for a miracle, it is quite another thing to follow God simply because you want a miracle. Itm

Again, it's not wrong to ask for a miracle, but it's important that our motivation be pure! I think all of you would agree that Northshore Church needs a miracle in the coming months! We need God to lead us to the man of God who will be our next pastor! And we must remember that our eyes must not be on a man, but on Jesus! Our prayer needs to be that the person God leads our team to reach out to will be a man who seeks to be an example of Jesus and one who will lead like Jesus. Remember, there are many different styles of leadership. The most important thing is that a leader be submitted to God's leadership by The Spirit in every aspect of their life! Avoid comparisons with me. I'm not the standard, Jesus is, and no man will ever fully meet that standard. So give the next guy a lot of grace, a lot of prayers, and a lot of loving support! And let me say this, Jay and I have worked together hand in glove and I couldn't do what I do if he didn't faithfully do what he does. He's been our executive pastor and I've been in the role of Senior pastor. Some churches have what's called a lead pastor who may or may not do the line share of preaching, but gives leadership to the preaching ministry. I've been the lead in the preaching ministry at our church, so for better or worse, you've heard from me a majority of the time. But didn't Jay bless our hearts last week with that powerful message? And the week before Andrew? Yes indeed! Here's the deal, I would never ask you to blindly follow any man, but if the next guy is truly seeking to glorify Jesus and reach and disciple the lost, then get behind him and help make Northshore's future greater and brighter than ever!

So we need a miracle and what would be God's motivation in giving us our miracle?

To reveal His love for us

To lead us to know Him personally and more intimately

To help us fulfill His purpose for our lives

Northshore Church has needed a miracle before and God granted it. I want to share with you how God has worked in amazing ways to get us where we are today! Think back to Hurricane Katrina. We had built out about 16,000 square feet in the old factory outlet mall and were doing a lease purchase for the building. However, after Katrina the owners voided the contract with a clause that said if the building were ever more than 40% damaged all contracts were void! They pocketed the insurance money and we were homeless as a church. We needed a miracle. We met in so many different places, other churches on Sunday nights, then Crazy Carl's fireworks, and then in a tent in their parking lot during the fireworks season in the middle of the summer!

Sweatin' for Jesus! Then for a long time in what was then The Slidell Athletic Club. Three services every Sunday, along with setup on Saturday nights and tear down every Sunday afternoon. We then bought land and had a church from Idaho come and help us clear it. We had to do wetland mitigation on some of it. Then came the unthinkable...after all that work, every bid on the building came back way over budget. We were told to scrap plans and start over. I was left dazed and wondering! Lord, what is happening, I don't understand. What's that stretching sound? My faith, my heart, my mind and my spirit! God spoke to my heart and asked me a question. "So what ya been preaching on lately son?" "Your miracles in the New Testament and I'm going to be preaching on how You still work miracles today and why?" It was then that God put this question in my heart..."Well, do you really believe what you're preaching or don't you?" I said, "Yes sir, I do." Then God spoke to my heart, these words..."Then practice what you preach!"

I was invited to preach at Oakdale, LA, and talk about God's work through our church in spite of our losses. I showed the video history of Northshore Church. In it I saw Jay holding his daughter in his arms when she was a little thing. They were singing a praise song. His little girl Emily didn't have a worry in the world. She wasn't worried for one moment that her dad would drop her. Never crossed her mind. Then it hit me. I bet God wishes we would trust Him like that! He spoke to my heart and said, "I'm not going to drop you! I am your Heavenly Father, trust me."

After I got back to town, God led me to drive to the old Schewegmen's bld. I had already talked to the owners a little over a year before, but things didn't work out so they were going to proceed with their plans to turn this building into climate-controlled storage. I fully expected to see that project finished, but as it turned out the parish had placed a moratorium on storage buildings for the time. I was so surprised! I called Donny Rouse and he personally talked to me. Then told me to call a representative, Don Swartz. Don said, funny you should call, every time I look at that building I think "boy that would make a great church building!" Don told me he would make a few phone calls and get back with me.

God was working overtime in my heart. I don't have time to give you all the details, but God convicted me to trust Him and He worked miracles. God then put these challenges before me about reaching Slidell and surrounding areas with the Gospel. Someone has got to step up to the plate! Someone's got get out of the boat! Someone's got to be willing to walk on the water! Someone's got to believe God can do the undoable! Someone needs to practice what they preach! Someone needs to live the mission! Someone needs to go big for God's glory and not their own!

I shared this on a Thursday with a group of church planters and denominational leaders. They gathered around me, laid hands on me and prayed that God would work a miracle for His glory. Meanwhile...Don called a developer and a partner, Bill, who remembered me. I remember him because he had told me he was a pilot and you all know I'm a "wanna be pilot!" Don said, "Bill wants to work with you guys and has already instructed me to come down off the lease price. Can you meet us Friday morning at the building?" I called a leadership team meeting for Friday morning at 9:00 and we prayed. The rest is history! Bill and the Rouses worked with us

and because we were a 501 c3 non-profit organization, they were able to give us an in-kind donation to help and we were able to obtain financing for the rest. It was truly a miracle! I wish I had the time to tell you all of the details of the miracle God worked to get us into this building. Thank You Jesus! And, by the way, while Bill doesn't live in Slidell, he drives over and worships with us when he can! I'm so grateful for his friendship and allowing God to use him to help us touch the lives we've touched by having this awesome facility! Let me just say this: God didn't do all of this without a plan for the future! God is the ultimate planner and let me tell you He's got even bigger plans for Northshore Church. The question for us today as it was for me after Katrina is this...Do we have the faith of a little child and are we willing to trust that He will not drop us? Change, transition, surprises and difficulties, never catch God by surprise! He's always ready and has a plan! When God laid it on my heart eight years ago to share with the staff and leadership team that we needed to begin planning to transition leadership of the church to God's next leader, He gave me such a peace that Northshore Church is His church and that He would take good care of it! I trust Him with all my heart to do what He promised! And just know, I'll never retire from sharing the good news of Jesus, I'll do that until I draw my last breath! And when I think about Northshore Church, which is not a building, but a people, I know that you will never stop sharing Jesus and caring for the hurting and lost people of this community. The building we are in is a wonderful place for us to gather as the church to worship and to receive instructions for transforming worship, people and the world!

Listen to this Old Testament prayer that I think is a great prayer for Northshore Church today...

1 Chr 29:16 O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.

1 Chr 29:17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

1 Chr 29:18 O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.

We need a miracle from God at this time in our church's life! What would motivate me to desire God to work such a miracle? I want to see the greatest miracle of modern times continue to happen at Northshore. And what is that miracle? The miracle of changed lives! Lives transformed by the mercy, grace, forgiveness and love of Jesus Christ! People finding God's purpose for their lives! People finding that beautiful relationship with Jesus! And those transformed people reaching out to others with the same good news that changed their lives.

My prayer is that you all will get behind whoever the next pastor of our church is and that Northshore Church will do more to build God's Kingdom and reach hurting and lost people than it ever has! In fact I hope the vision that God gave us when we planted Northshore Church will continue coming to reality.

Our Vision is to raise up a healthy church that will impact the Northshore and ultimately the world with the life changing message of Jesus Christ!

Paul said this about the church in Ephesus and it definitely applies to Northshore Church...

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

Ephesians 3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith....

Some have asked me where I get this thing about asking Jesus to come into our hearts! Right there in God's Word! You see, our heart, not the one I had worked on a few weeks ago that pumps blood, but that part of us that is the seat of our emotions, our desires, our thoughts, our motives, that part of us that gives love and receives love, that's where we need Christ to dwell through His Precious Holy Spirit! Only when Jesus dwells in our hearts through faith can He help us control our emotions, purify our desires, direct our thoughts, give us the right motives, and help us to give and receive love in the right way! Paul continues...

Ephesians 3:17...And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

Ephesians 3:18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

Ephesians 3:19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Ephesians 3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Let's pray!