

Hope and Power

Lesson for April 30, 2023

Unit III: The Birth of the Church

Scriptural Background: Acts 1:1-11

Printed Text: Acts 1:1-11

Key verse: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”* (Acts 1:8a, NIV)

During the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, German pastor Paul Gerhardt and his family were forced to flee from their home. One night as they stayed in a small village inn, homeless and afraid, his wife broke down and cried openly in despair. To comfort her, Gerhardt reminded her of Scripture promises about God's provision and keeping. Then, going out to the garden to be alone, he too broke down and wept. He felt he had come to his darkest hour.

Soon afterward, Gerhardt felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the Lord's presence. Taking his pen, he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to many. "Give to the winds thy fears; hope, and be undismayed; God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears; God shall lift up thy head. Through waves and clouds and storms He gently clears the way. Wait thou His time, so shall the night soon end in joyous day."

It is often in our darkest times that God makes His presence known most clearly. He uses our sufferings and troubles to show us that He is our only source of strength. And when we see this truth, like Pastor Gerhardt, we receive new hope. Are you facing a great trial? Take heart. Put yourself in God's hands. Wait for His timing. He will give you a "song in the night."

Our Daily Bread

Key Terms

1. **Alive** (verse 3) – To live, experience God's gift of life; be living.
2. **Baptized** (verse 5) – Dipped; sunk; submerged. Baptism in the Bible expresses an identification with Christ's death and resurrection—the old self was crucified with Christ (through the waters of death), and now followers of Jesus have risen with him in “newness of life” (Romans 6:3-11).
3. **Chosen** (verse 2) – Selected; “picked out for myself”.
4. **Depart** (verse 4) – To separate, divide, put apart; withdraw; “leave” (NIV).
5. **Kingdom** (verse 3) – Sovereignty; royal power; rule, especially by God. Kingdom of God, also called Kingdom of Heaven, is the spiritual realm over which God reigns as king, or the fulfillment on Earth of God's will.
6. **Promise(d)** (verse 4) – A declaration or assurance that one will do a particular thing or that a particular thing will happen. In the scripture a promise is "a gift graciously bestowed, not a pledge secured by negotiation.
7. **Teach** (verse 1) – To direct, admonish, instruct, preach.

Lesson Background

The Acts of the Apostles is a unique and therefore crucial book of the New Testament. It alone presents an extensive picture of early church life and history. The title as we know it comes from the second century and only partially discloses the theme of the document. The book focuses primarily on the acts of two apostles, Peter, and Paul. And it proposes to show the continuation “of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (1:1).

It contains the acts Jesus carried out after His ascension, through the Holy Spirit, in establishing the church. The author, Luke, follows the Great Commission in developing this theme, showing the beginning in Jerusalem, the outreach to Judea and Samaria, and the expansion to the distant city of Rome (1:8).

Luke wrote to convince Theophilus of the “certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:4). Theophilus was probably a Gentile official who had been won to Christ, and Luke desires that he may understand more clearly the historical events that underlie his Christian faith and practice.

Second, Luke’s purpose is not to write the history of the early church. Nothing is recorded for large segments of time. Luke is not a chronicler seeking to record every event. But he does write a history that shows the beginning and spread of the church. He focuses on the important initial events and those that give meaning to the epistles of Paul by tracing Paul’s ministry.

There are many who feel that Acts is one of the most important Books in the Bible, because it shows the struggles of the early Christians, and how many of the practices of the church were established.

In Acts, we see the departure and promise of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. We also, see teachings on the power to minister or witness that the Spirit gives to the believers. We will see home missions and foreign missions dealt with as well. A great deal of Acts deals with Paul’s journeys.

We see in the Book of Acts how the gospel of Jesus Christ is spread not only to the Hebrews, but to the entire world through the empowering of the Holy Spirit of God. One thing peculiar to Acts, is that Luke reassures in this letter that Christians are not trying to overthrow the Roman government.

Chapter 1 begins where the book of Luke ends. Luke begins this part of his history by reminding readers of his previous book, the Gospel of Luke, and the situation he had described at the end of that book. Jesus suffered and died and was raised from the dead. He appeared to the disciples and gave them a dramatic new understanding of the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 45). The Old Testament had not only predicted the Messiah and his suffering, but it also predicted that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (verse 47).

How would this prophecy be fulfilled? Jesus reminded the disciples that they had seen the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies (verse 48) — and in this Jesus implied that the disciples would be involved in fulfilling the biblical prediction about preaching.

How could the disciples preach to all nations? The Gospel of Luke does not tell us. But it tells us that Jesus told the disciples to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (verse 49). What is this power, and what is it for? This is where Acts picks up the story.

The Lesson In Depth

I. The Gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-5)

The former treatise: Refers to Luke’s gospel. Both books were written to an otherwise unknown “Theophilus”. This man might have been a Christian wanting instruction. He might have been a Roman official being briefed by Luke about the history of the Christian movement. Or, the name could be symbolic, because the name Theophilus means “God-lover.” Theophilus probably was a Roman official since Luke designates him as “most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3).

Of all that Jesus began both to do and teach: That account, “Former treatise”; chronicled the life and teaching of Jesus, through His death, resurrection, and ascension (Luke 24:51).

Until the day in which He was taken up: Jesus, **through the Holy Spirit**, instructed the apostles regarding what to do in His absence. He had given commandments to the apostles.

Significantly, Jesus did this **through the Holy Spirit**. This was the resurrected, glorified Lord Jesus Christ, risen with all authority and sovereignty. Yet He still chose to not rely on His own resources but relied on the power and the presence of the indwelling **Holy Spirit**.

The **Holy Spirit** – the Third Member of the Holy Trinity – is the aspect of God that lives and empowers and inspires man. The Holy Spirit has a work among those who are not yet believers, but also a great and significant work in those who believe.

If the glorified, resurrected Jesus needed and relied on the Holy Spirit, so should we. This is a pattern for the rest of the Book of Acts, which shows us what the Holy Spirit does operating through the church. “The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. If even he was indebted to the Holy Spirit for the power of his ministry, surely, we cannot afford to attempt the work appointed us without the same anointing.” (Pierson)

To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs: Jesus also established the fact of His resurrection with many infallible proofs during the forty days after his resurrection but before His ascension. He left *no possible doubt* that He was resurrected, exactly as He had promised.

In 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul described one of these **many infallible proofs**: *He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present*. More than 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus, and most of them were still alive some 25 years later in the days of Paul's ministry.

Speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: The teaching Jesus gave during that period after His resurrection and before His ascension is not recorded, but we are told that He used that time to speak *of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*.

He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem: Jesus had nothing else for the disciples to do other than to **wait** for the coming of the Holy Spirit (**the Promise of the Father**). Jesus knew that they really could do nothing effective for the Kingdom of God until the Spirit came. According to David Guzik:

- **To wait** means that it was worth waiting for.
- **To wait** means that they had a promise it would come.
- **To wait** means they must *receive* it; they couldn't create it themselves.
- **To wait** means that they would be tested by waiting, at least a little.

He commanded... the Promise of Father... baptized with the Holy Spirit: This is another example of how the fact of the Trinity – that there is One God in Three Persons – is woven into the fabric of the New Testament. Here we see that **He** (Jesus) told of the **Promise of the Father**, which is the coming of the **Holy Spirit**.

It is significant that this coming, filling, and empowering of the Holy Spirit is called “**the Promise of the Father**.”

- It shows that they should wait for it with eager anticipation; a “**Promise of the Father**” could only be good.
- It shows that it is reliable; the Father would never **Promise** something He could not fulfill.
- It shows that the **Promise** belongs to all His children, since it comes from God as *our* Father.
- It shows that it must be received by faith, as is the pattern with the promises of God throughout the Bible.

You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit: The idea of being baptized is to be immersed or covered over in something; even as John baptized people in water, so these disciples would be “immersed” in the Holy Spirit.

Not many days from now: They knew that this **Promise of the Father** would come, but not immediately. It would be **days from now**, but not **many days**. Jesus had a purpose in not telling them exactly when it would come.

II. Power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6-8)

Therefore, when they had come together: This would be the last time they would see Jesus in His physical body, until they went to heaven to be with Him forever. There is nothing specific in the text to show us that they *knew* this would be their last time seeing Him on earth, other than the weight of the question they were about to ask.

Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? This was a question asked many times before, but it had a special relevance now. They knew that Jesus had instituted the New Covenant (Luke 22:20). They also knew that the restoration of **the kingdom to Israel** was part of the New Covenant (as seen in Jeremiah 23:1-8, Ezekiel 36:16-30, Ezekiel 37:21-28).

It was actually reasonable for them to wonder when the *rest* of the New Covenant would be fulfilled. The response of Jesus in the following verses also indicates that He did not rebuke them or even correct them for the question. He simply told them that the answer wasn't for them to know.

“The verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment.” (Stott)

The disciples certainly knew the many Old Testament prophecies describing the spiritual *and* national rebirth of Israel. The disciples probably thought that the spiritual rebirth seemed certain, so the national would also come.

It is not for you to know: Jesus warned the disciples against inquiring into aspects of the timing of God's kingdom, because those things belong to God the Father alone (which the Father has put in His own authority). Jesus did not say that there was to be *no* restoration of the kingdom to Israel; He simply said that speculation into the time and date of this restoration was not proper for the disciples.

But you shall receive power: If the national kingdom they wanted would be delayed, the **power** they needed would not. They would soon receive power with the coming of the **Holy Spirit**.

And you shall be witnesses to Me: The natural result of receiving this promised power would be that they would become **witnesses** of Jesus, all over the earth.

Notice that this really wasn't a command; it was a simple statement of fact: **When the Holy Spirit has come upon you... you shall be witnesses of Me.** The words **shall be** are in the indicative, not the imperative. Jesus didn't recommend that they become witnesses; He said they *would be witnesses*.

If we want to *be witnesses*, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The best training program for evangelism is of little effectiveness without the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 43:10 states, *You are My witnesses*.

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth: The disciples were to be concerned with world evangelism and discipleship. We see in verse 8, why we need to receive power from God. It is not for our own use so that we can brag to someone else; it is to make our witness of Jesus more powerful. The message of the gospel is not just for Israel, but to all nations. We read in Revelation how people of every nationality will be represented in heaven.

III. He Will Return (Acts 1:9-11)

When He had spoken these things, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight: Jesus was taken up from them as He blessed them (Luke 24:50). As He slowly disappeared into the sky, surrounded by a cloud they continued to gaze upward.

While they watched, He was taken up: It was important for Jesus to leave His disciples in this manner. In theory, He certainly could have simply vanished to heaven and the Father's presence in a secret sort of way. But by ascending in this manner, Jesus wanted His followers to know that He was gone for good, as opposed to the way He appeared and reappeared during the 40 days after His resurrection.

Remember Jesus' words to His disciples in John 16:7: *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* Now the disciples could know that that promise would be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit was coming because Jesus promised to send the Spirit when He left.

Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? The **two men** (apparently angels) told the disciples to put their attention in the right place (obedience to Jesus' command to return to Jerusalem), not in wondering where and how Jesus went.

This same Jesus: This is a glorious phrase. It reminds us that the Jesus ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand of God the Father is the **same Jesus** of the Gospels. He is the same Jesus of love, grace, goodness, wisdom, and care.

Will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven: Jesus will return just as He left.

- He left *physically* and **will so come in like manner.**
- He left *visibly* and **will so come in like manner.**
- He left from the *Mount of Olives* and **will so come in like manner.**
- He left in the *presence of His disciples* and **will so come in like manner.**
- He left *blessing His church* and **will so come in like manner.**

Lesson Summary

The book of Acts is the continuing story of the ministry of Jesus Christ as He ministers through His church, which is His body - and through those of us who are members of His church. At the end of Luke's Gospel and at the beginning of Acts, Jesus promises that same Spirit of God to come upon us.

Jesus is no longer physically here to heal the sick and to feed the hungry. The mission of Jesus now falls on the disciples. Jesus tells His disciples, immediately before He is "lifted up", that it is their job to take His message global—"to the end of the earth."

Summarily, this week's lesson tells us:

- Jesus instructs the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit
 - For us the same wisdom holds. Obey the instructions of Jesus and wait for the Spirit.
 - Running ahead of the Spirit or trying to do things in Jesus' kingdom without the Spirit is not a good idea.
- The promises that Jesus gives are good and Jesus desires to give you a good gift.
 - Sometimes we have to be patient and wait for the gift, but don't stop seeking the gift.
 - Trust Jesus, the wait will be worth it!
- The Holy Spirit provides the power to witness.
 - Seek the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - The church needs the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the mission of witnessing.