

April 21, 2013

# A Gospel Centered Community

## Waiting For the Promise

### Acts 1:12 – 26

If you were here last week, you know that we began a new series in the book of Acts, or more precisely, the book of the Acts of the Apostles as it has been titled. However, given the content and nature of this book, it should be more properly called The Acts of the Risen Lord by the Holy Spirit in and through the Church. As Ben so clearly pointed out last week, the book of Acts is about Jesus and His continued work by the Holy Spirit through the church. Luke tells us this in the opening sentence of this book, *“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach...”* In other words, Luke is telling us that his first volume, his gospel account, was about what the incarnate Jesus **began** to do and teach and this second volume is about what the resurrected and glorified Jesus **continues** to do and teach, no longer in the flesh, but by the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is about the continued work of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through the church.

The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is all over the pages of this book. He dominates the narrative. Sixty times in this book, Luke talks about the Spirit and forty times He specifically says, 'The Holy Spirit'. Everything revolves around Him. And if you read the whole book, you begin to see that the means of energy, vitality, and momentum in the church is the Holy Spirit Himself. How is it that a ragtag band of fishermen, farmers, servants and slaves turned the world upside down in a matter of a few years? How is it possible that Christianity, that as Ben said, began in the Roman Empire equivalent of Eatonville, became the official religion of the greatest Empire the world had ever seen in a little over two hundred years? How can it be that since that time, millions of Christians have willingly laid down their lives for the sake of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, counting their sufferings as joy and their sacrifices as pleasure, and their losses as gains? The answer can only be that something, or more precisely someone, invaded their lives and changed their minds and transformed their living, namely, the Holy Spirit.

And Acts gives us the account of the work of this person. Jesus, the risen Savior, was sent by the Father to this earth to accomplish the redemption of the world, and He did that on the cross. After His resurrection, He appeared to the disciples and others over a period of forty days, along with, Luke says, *'many convincing proofs'*, speaking and teaching them many more things about the kingdom of God, and giving them a charge, *'Wait for the promise'*, and then gives them a mission, *'You will be My witnesses'*. And then He leaves them. Everything that comes after is about the work of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is not about organizations, or philosophies of life, or gaining the moral high ground, or a guide to a better life – Christianity is about the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men and women, making sinners into saints, rescuing fallen, lost humanity from the snare and curse of sin into the glorious freedom of the sons of God. No teaching will do this, no philosophy will work here, no moral living is sufficient to take hell-bound sinners and utterly transform them into heaven bound saints. And so as we go through this book, keep your eyes on the Holy Spirit. He is the main player on the stage here.

Last week Ben showed us how Jesus **gives His community, the church, a mission; empowers His community for the mission; and gives His community certainty of the success of the mission.** And if you haven't read or listened to that message yet, I want to encourage you to go to the Summit website and either listen to the podcast or download the pdf and read it. It is crucial that we understand that we have a specific task that we've been given as the community of the redeemed of the Lord to do. We've been saved from the curse in order to bear witness to others of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. That's our mission. That's what we've been called to do. We've not been saved to waste our lives on ourselves. We've been saved to bring glory to God by pointing others to Jesus. And we need to understand that Jesus has not left us to our own devices to do this, but has sent the Holy Spirit to do the work in and through us that He has called us to do. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the power behind the mission. And we need to be filled with a certainty that this mission will succeed. We can be sure that God's purpose to be known and praised, honored and worshiped by all the peoples of the earth is invincible. It is an absolutely certain promise. It is going to happen. *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore . . .'* Matthew 28:19 Because He has all authority in the universe, because the Father has given us the promise of the Holy Spirit, we can be sure that His will, will be done.

So let's look at the text this morning. And actually I just want to focus mainly on verse fourteen. Not because the other stuff in these verses is not important, but because there is so much to say about verse fourteen. Jesus spends forty days with the disciples, teaching them about the kingdom, and then before He leaves He tells them to wait in Jerusalem for what the Father had promised. So the rest of this first chapter has to do with waiting for something. Verse eight tells us that what they were waiting for was something the prophet Joel prophesied hundreds of years before. *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit...And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."* **Joel 2:28-32**

We know this is the case because in chapter two, Peter declares that what the crowd was seeing and hearing was what Joel prophesied would happen. So the disciples waiting was filled with expectation and assurance that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on them in a special way. They had the word of the prophets and they had the word of Jesus. Luke had quoted Jesus in his first book as saying: *And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*" Luke 24:49 And then in Acts Jesus says that being clothed with power was being baptized in the Holy Spirit: *'...wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, "you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* Acts 1:4-5 So they went back to Jerusalem to wait. So what did this waiting look like?

Look at verse 12: *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.* Acts 1:12 Here is where they were – **the Mount of Olives**, which by the way, is where Zechariah tells us that one day Jesus will return. That is the main reason that whole mountain is really a cemetery now, because devout Jews believe that is where the resurrection of the righteous will begin and they don't want to miss it. Acts 1:12 just says that the disciples returned to Jerusalem, but in Luke's first book he adds more: *While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.* Luke 24:45-52 And in Acts 1:14 Luke says: *All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*

So we get a picture of these disciples, not as fearful, weak, powerless, joyless followers, but courageous joyful people who were continually in the temple worshipping God and having prayer meetings in the upper room. They were praying in the temple, and they were praying at home. They were praying in private and they were praying in public. They were devoted to prayer. The word is **proskartereo** and it means constant in something, persevering in something, steadfastly attentive to something. Luke says they were persevering in prayer – they were steadfastly attentive to prayer – they were devoting themselves to prayer. From the time Jesus left them standing on the Mount of Olives to the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, the followers of Jesus, about 120 at this time, were joyfully praying, and worshipping and blessing God both publicly and privately.

One of the things this says to us is that there was great evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit even before Pentecost. All of that prayer and praising and great joy and blessing God is evidence of the power of God. Especially then – especially in that place. Remember how they all ran away and went into hiding when Jesus was arrested and tried and crucified? Remember how fearful, weak and powerless the disciples seemed then? But now they spent some time with a resurrected Jesus, heard Him talk about the kingdom, saw Him taken up to heaven, and they went back into the den of lions as it were with great joy – publicly and privately. That doesn't happen without the power of God. That doesn't happen without the presence of the Holy Spirit.

So where did the disciples get this power before Pentecost? If you go back to the gospel of John chapter 20, you read what happened when Jesus appeared to the disciples as they were hiding behind locked doors: *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.*" John 20:21-22 The Bible clearly teaches that we receive the Holy Spirit the moment we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior. I Corinthians 12:13 declares, *"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."* Romans 8:9 tells us that if a person does not possess the Holy Spirit, he or she does not belong to Christ: *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."* Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the seal of salvation for all those who believe: *"Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit*

*guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”*

Many scriptures make it abundantly clear that our salvation is secured the moment we receive Christ as Savior. And therefore, if we are to believe Luke, and we should, there was a real impartation of the Holy Spirit weeks before the spectacular outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Which means that the disciples were indwelt by the Spirit prior to their receiving the promise of the Father. In a message on this text, John Piper observed that ***'These disciples were already Christians before they received this power that Jesus was promising here. In fact they were remarkable lively Christians before this special power fell upon them at Pentecost, and then repeatedly throughout the book of Acts'***.

And in this text this morning we have further evidence of that in Peter's leadership in choosing a disciple to take the place of Judas. Now we won't go into all the text, but I think that it serves to underscore the notion that these disciples already had evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit prior to chapter two. As they are gathered together, Peter gets up and talks about the fulfillment of Scripture concerning Judas. And he reaches back into a couple of Old Testament passages in the Psalms and applies them to the present day situation. That takes insight – that takes Holy Spirit inspiration.

So it seems clear that what the disciples were waiting for and praying for was something extraordinary, something that was more than the ordinary power necessary for Christian living. Something more than the experience of power that makes you a Christian and makes you joyfully love God and worship God and devote yourself to prayer. Something that empowered them to be the witnesses Jesus called them to be. They had the Holy Spirit – they had the promises of Jesus – they had the words of God in the Old Testament – but they needed something more for the mission they'd been given – they needed power. And Jesus told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for it.

And it is clear that waiting to them meant prayer, because that's the thing Luke focuses on here. Jesus said 'Wait for it' and they went to prayer. They knew they had an impossible mission ahead of them. They knew they were supposed to witness to a hostile crowd in Jerusalem; they knew they were supposed to witness to the despised Samaritans; they knew they were supposed to witness in places they'd never even heard of. And they knew they needed something more. **So they were devoting themselves to prayer.** Because prayer is not trying to persuade God to do something He's reluctant to do – at its essence, prayer is asking God to fulfill His promises.

If you look at the places where Jesus teaches His disciples about prayer, you can see what I mean. Turn to Luke chapter 11. In Luke 11, His disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, and Jesus says 'Pray this way,' and goes on to give them a prayer, and then tells them a story about a reluctant neighbor to illustrate prayer. And the whole point of the story is to illustrate that God is not like the reluctant neighbor – but He is our heavenly Father who delights to give His children good gifts. Furthermore, Jesus tells them that the nature of prayer is such that it requires persistent asking, and seeking, and knocking. In other words, devotion to prayer. That is how God designed that prayer should be. Don't ask me why – ask God – He's the one that designed prayer this way.

And then Jesus says that the answer to all our prayers, the answer to our relentless and persistent appeals to heaven's throne is the Holy Spirit Himself. *'...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'* Luke 11:13 In other words, we should **pray expecting the Holy Spirit.** When you go to the Father for whatever you ask Him for, whatever it is, He gives the Holy Spirit in response to your asking. You ask for strength – He gives you the Spirit of power. You ask for help, He gives you the Helper. You ask for comfort – He gives you the Comforter. You ask for wisdom – He gives you the Spirit of wisdom. You ask for salvation – He sends the Spirit of regeneration. You ask for love and joy and peace and gentleness and goodness and faith and self-control – He gives you the Spirit whose fruit is released in your life. You ask for the gift – He gives you the giver. You ask for the effect – He gives you the cause. You ask for the product – He gives you the source.

And here the disciples are asking for the promise of the Holy Spirit. I don't know, but I would guess that some of their praying reached back into Joel and they were praying things like, 'Father, you promised to pour out Your Holy Spirit in these days and we're asking for the fulfillment of that promise. What we see in Joel is the promise of extraordinary power through the Holy Spirit and we're asking for that.' I think they recognized that the promise of the Holy Spirit was for the purpose of mission and they needed that. That passage in Joel concludes by saying, *And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be*

*saved*. And so the extraordinary power indicated by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit there was for the purpose of taking this witness to the world so that people would call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

Saints, we have the Holy Spirit residing within by virtue of believing in Christ – every born again believer has the Spirit of God. And every effort that is lasting and of eternal value is Holy Spirit-borne and Holy Spirit-empowered. But we've been given a mission and I believe that this book of Acts, right from the beginning shows us that ***we need seasons of extraordinary power*** for an ever-expanding witness of the gospel in the world. And that it is right and good and even necessary that we pray for that. As you read this book you begin to realize that there is a constant thread of the Holy Spirit coming in extraordinary power at key and crucial times to move the church along and spread the witness of the gospel in ever-increasing waves. I like the quote from Josh Harris that Ben cited last Sunday: ***“Prayer is the posture that acknowledges that it is only by God’s power that we can bear witness.”*** And prayer is the acknowledgement that we need extraordinary power to witness.

What we are not asking for are some sort of weird, out-of-body experiences, gold dust from heaven or angel feathers, or power encounters, or magical mystery moments. We are asking for the power and presence of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of being His witnesses. We are asking to be filled as Peter was in order to stand in front of hostile audiences and preach with clarity and power and conviction the gospel that saves. We are asking to be filled with the Spirit like Stephen to give witness to the forgiveness of Jesus even as he was being crushed by stones. I am convinced that we do not have because we do not ask and the Father is saying 'Ask Me, ask Me, ask Me'. We need this power at Summit. I need it. The missionaries we support need it, and you need it, if we want our lives to count for eternity. ***If we don't have it, our witness will lack conviction, courage, and conversions.*** This is what the power of the Holy Spirit brings.

First of all the Holy Spirit brings ***conviction***. Jesus told His disciples in John that when the Holy Spirit comes, ***'...He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment'*** John 16:8 First of all conviction by the Holy Spirit is like turning on the lights in a room. I'm pretty sure you've all had the experience of walking into what you assume is a fairly clean room, turning on the lights and suddenly seeing cockroaches all over the place, scurrying back into hiding. You think you're a pretty good person and all of a sudden you find yourself under the spotlight of the Holy Spirit and you discover you're not as good as you imagine. Maybe you've been in church, listening to the sermon, feeling pretty good about yourself until the preacher gets to one point and all of a sudden, there you are, exposed by the light, caught out in the open, trying to scurry back into hiding.

Unless we have the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to penetrate dark, and sin-hardened hearts, our witness is in vain. We need the kind of power that flowed through the witness of Peter on Pentecost that when the people listening heard what he said, the Bible tells us that they were 'pierced to the heart'. And the kind of power that caused the battle-hardened Roman jailer to fall down in front of Paul and Silas crying out, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' It is not our well-reasoned arguments, or eloquent speech that will bring conviction that leads to repentance – it is the power of the Holy Spirit and nothing less.

The Holy Spirit also brings ***courage***. Courage to open your mouth to proclaim the good news of the gospel. In Acts 4, the church was together praying and it says: ***And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*** Acts 4:31 They were still in a very hostile place – the Jewish authorities still hated Jesus and His followers. They crucified Jesus; they would soon stone Stephen; Saul would begin ravaging the church; and Herod would soon behead James, the brother of John. And what they needed then, and after, was boldness to continue to witness to the grace of Jesus. And that is what we need today. And that only comes by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When Stephen made his witness of the gospel in front of that hostile crowd in Acts 7, Luke tells us that it cut them to the quick and so enraged them that they were gnashing their teeth at him. But Stephen, Luke says, ***'...being filled with the Holy Spirit...'***, was gazing intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand. It was as though he didn't even notice the danger he was in. Where does this kind of boldness come from? It comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit. Where does this kind of courage come from? It comes from the power of God – Holy Spirit power. To reach this community, to reach this city, to reach our neighbors and the world, we need the kind of courage that comes from the Holy Spirit. This is no ordinary power – this is the kind of power that made the martyrs sing as they were being burned at the stake – and this is what we need to pray for.

Finally, it is the Holy Spirit that brings **conversion**. When the Holy Spirit comes on you in power, your witness to Christ comes with converting power. There was a shoemaker in London who used to go to listen to C.H. Spurgeon preach at the Music Hall. One day as he was in his seat in the middle of the place, listening to another good sermon by the Prince of Preachers, he said that Spurgeon suddenly pointed directly at him, as if he knew him, and told the congregation that he was a shoemaker and that he kept his shop open on Sundays. The shoemaker said, 'I should not have minded that, but he also said that I took ninepence the Sunday before, and there was a fourpence profit out of it'. And Spurgeon's conclusion to the congregation was, 'His soul is sold to Satan for fourpence!' The poor shoemaker said, 'I did take ninepence that day, and fourpence was the profit, but how he should know that, I could not tell. Then it struck me that it was God who had spoken to my soul through him, so I shut up my shop the next Sunday. At first, I was afraid to go again to hear him, lest he should tell the people more about me, but afterwards I went, and the Lord met with me and saved my soul'.

I am convinced that this is what they were waiting for – this is what they were praying for – this is the promise of the Father poured out through the Holy Spirit. If we are ever to take up the commission our Lord gave us with authority and power and courage, it will only be because we have been visited by the Holy Spirit in power. What about you and I individually? Can we say that we are satisfied with the current level of conviction, courage and conversion in our witness? I'm not. Are you? Have we become complacent and content with weakness and have forgotten the amazing promise – You shall receive power! I believe that we need to wait just as they waited, not like couch potatoes, but in earnest prayer – devoting ourselves to prayer for the Holy Spirit to come in power so that our witness will go out with conviction, courage and converting power in the world.

**'Come Holy Spirit, now! Thou are with us but come with power and let us feel Thy sacred might!'**  
C.H. Spurgeon

*Our gracious Father God,*

*We thank You this morning for your promise of extraordinary power through the Holy Spirit to do what You have commissioned us to do in the world. We recognize that all the divine purposes of Your love and the redemption purchased by Christ, and the commission given by Jesus, are vain unless the Holy Spirit works within us, regenerating us by His power, giving us eyes to see Jesus and lips that proclaim His excellencies to the nations. Grant that we would be a people devoted to prayer, praying until heaven comes down and we are clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit, You are ever with us, but come with power and let us feel Your sacred might so that our witness of Christ in the world would be piercing and convicting, bold and courageous, leading men to repentance and faith for Your glory and Your name's sake, we pray in the saving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*