

## **20260809 Acts 1:1-8, A Mission and a Promise**

Whenever we approach a book of the Bible, it helps to know a little about its background, and Acts conveniently gives us that in its first three verses. Look with me at Acts 1:1-3. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

What these verses do not tell you is that this book was written by a man named Luke, a physician and close traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Notice the reference to the first book in verse one. That is what we call the Gospel of Luke. Even though our Bibles insert another book between them, Luke and Acts actually belong together as volume one and volume two of the same work, both addressed to a man named Theophilus, most likely a Roman official whom Luke was either trying to persuade toward faith or teaching as a new believer.

The Gospel of Luke focuses on the earthly ministry of Jesus, his sinless life, his death for our sins, and his resurrection three days later. Acts picks up where Luke leaves off. It focuses on the early church, how it was established and how it grew. Here in chapter 1, the risen Jesus tells his followers in verse eight, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. That single verse is an outline of the whole book. Witness in Jerusalem covers chapters 1 through 7. Witness in Judea and Samaria covers chapters 8 through 12. Witness to the end of the earth, followed through the ministry of Paul, covers chapters 13 through 28. The entire book traces the spread of the gospel, and Jesus announces that mission right here.

Try to imagine how overwhelming that must have felt to this ordinary band of followers. It would be like someone handing me a scalpel and telling me to perform brain surgery, then walking away. I imagine that is exactly how the disciples felt, which is why Jesus does not only give them a mission. He gives them a promise. That promise is summed up in three words, The Holy Spirit. The main theme of this passage is that Jesus gives his disciples both a mission and a promise.

### **Jesus Gives His Disciples a Promise**

We find the promise in verses four and five. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to 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. Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not tell them to do their best until the Spirit arrives.

He orders them, some translations say commands them, not to even attempt the mission without the Spirit.

Yet many Christians today are not very familiar with the Holy Spirit. J. I. Packer compared this to the disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19, who said, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. That is a bit exaggerated, but there is truth in it. Many of us live practically as though the Trinity were the Father, the Son, and the Holy Bible, barely knowing who the Spirit is or what he does in our lives and our mission.

But as we move through Acts, we will see the Spirit is the one moving everything forward. The official title is the Acts of the Apostles, but a better title might be the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. In chapter two the Spirit enables the apostles to speak in other languages and empowers Peter to preach at Pentecost. In chapter four the Spirit gives Peter boldness before the religious leaders and sustains the church under persecution, and so on in the following chapters. And through the rest of the book the Spirit continually shows Paul where to go, what to say, and gives him the boldness to say it. You cannot go two steps in Acts without meeting the Holy Spirit. He is the one moving things forward every step of the way. As Packer said, were it not for the Holy Spirit, there would be no gospel, no faith, no church, no Christianity in the world at all.

That is just as true today. If the Holy Spirit did not exist, we might as well close our doors. It would not matter how good our programs were or how hard we worked toward our mission. Without the Spirit it would amount to nothing. Charles Spurgeon wrote, if we have not the Spirit which Jesus promised, we cannot perform the commission which Jesus gave. Spurgeon reminds us we cannot even create a fly, much less a new heart in someone. That is how radically dependent we are on the Holy Spirit for everything, which is why Jesus tells his disciples not to even try without him.

### **Jesus Gives His Disciples a Mission**

Jesus gives them not only a promise but a mission, found in verses six through eight. So, when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel. He said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Notice how little the disciples still understood. Even after the resurrection they still expected Jesus to overthrow Rome and restore Israel's political power. Jesus does not deny the Father will bring that about someday, but he redirects them to their present mission, to be His witnesses.

That word witness is a courtroom term, someone who testifies to what they have seen. Jesus wants them to bear witness to his resurrection and to what they have experienced because of it.

Again this mission is inseparable from the Spirit. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses. It is the Spirit who helps us see opportunities to witness, who gives us wisdom in what to say. Perhaps you have experienced a moment where the right words came out beyond what you naturally could have said. That is the Holy Spirit.

I believe the chief way the Spirit empowers our witness, the way the word power is emphasized throughout Acts, is by giving us supernatural boldness. And we need it, because what I struggle with most in sharing the gospel is worrying what people will think of me. Rico Tice, in his book *Honest Evangelism*, says that no matter how thoughtful or gentle you try to be, there is always a pain line, a moment where the conversation grows uncomfortable, because you cannot share the gospel without talking about sin and repentance. Crossing that pain line takes boldness from the Holy Spirit.

And this is nothing new. Sharing the true gospel has never been easy. Jesus says in John 3:19 that darkness hates the light. George Whitefield, used mightily during the First Great Awakening of the 1700s, preached in open fields to crowds of thousands without amplification. Yet he was also despised. People threw dirt clods and stones at him, banged drums to drown him out, drove cattle through his crowds. Once a man climbed the tree Whitefield was preaching under and urinated on him. On another occasion a rock struck him in the temple and he expected each breath to be his last, and thankfully God saved him. Whitefield said, if you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed. In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal. Yet he also said, the more I am opposed, the more joy I feel. And remember this happened in 1700s.

That joy and boldness is the work of the Holy Spirit. He gives us passion for God's glory that drives us to speak regardless of consequences. He causes us to care more about people's souls than our own reputation or comfort. He helps us overcome our fear of men and speak boldly even when unsure how the message will land. And he puts a joy in our hearts so great it has to come out in our conversations. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with that joy and boldness today.

Finally notice the scope of the mission. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth. God's heart for the nations was present in the Old Testament, but now it takes center stage, and the method shifts. The nations used to come and see. Now God's people are sent to go and tell, not on a short journey but to the farthest corners of the earth.

So where is God calling you out of your comfort zone? What conversations is he calling you to start? There is no question he is calling you to use your life for the gospel, calling you to be a missionary somewhere, even if it is right here.

I have become increasingly convicted lately of how insulated we are from risk. I once came across a photo of an old vintage playground, the kind where children climbed towering metal structures with no safety rail in sight. People simply had a higher tolerance for risk back then. I am not suggesting we recreate that playground, but I am suggesting we must not let our extreme aversion to risk keep us from obeying Jesus and taking risks for the gospel. What is God calling you to attempt that might even look reckless to others? Or at the very least, what gospel conversation have you been putting off? Acts 1:8 challenges us to step out, to do what William Carey said, expect great things from God, attempt great things for God. And Carey did not just say it, he lived it.

Remember, you are not alone. If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit, which means you already have everything you need to be a faithful and fruitful witness. You do not need years of experience or some certificate of readiness. You already have the Spirit of God and the Word of God. That is all you need. You are ready to be a witness from day one.