

## ACTS 1:6-11

### INTRODUCTION

Last week was mainly an introduction to this wonderful book although we did look at the opening 5 verses. We saw last week the importance of teaching Jesus message and the importance of being convinced by Jesus message. Of course we cannot teach or be convinced by Jesus' message without the power of the Holy Spirit.

I said last week that this book could be called the acts of the Holy Spirit, for He is prominent throughout this book. So with that reminder let us look at this passage today and notice.

#### 1. WRONG THINKING (vs. 6-7)

The great Jewish hope was for a Messiah who would come and deliver the nation of Israel from their oppression of Roman rule. They thought Jesus was that sort of Messiah but it soon became clear that was not the case for the deliverance that Jesus came to give was not physical but spiritual.

Now that Jesus has died and rose again, their hope turned to his final return, perhaps then he would come and free Israel from its bondage and establish his kingdom among the Jewish people again. But of course their thinking was faulty because Jesus kingdom is not nationalistic but universal and it is not physical but spiritual he is King of those who trust in him for salvation it is such people who are in his kingdom whether that is Jew or Gentile.

But what made the disciples make this statement in verse 6 and hold on to their nationalistic hope?

Well Jesus spoke in verse 5 of fulfilling his promises by sending his spirit and in the mind of the disciples this probably meant that his return is imminent therefore the restoring of the Kingdom to Israel must also be imminent. Their thinking was influenced by the fact that the outpouring of the Spirit had strong associations with the end times in Jewish thinking for Joel 2:28-32 was interpreted in nationalistic terms.

They thought that passage referred to an outpouring of the Spirit on Israel as a mark of the final great Messianic Day of the Lord when in their view Israel would be restored to her former glory days of David and Solomon.

Jesus actually doesn't answer their question or correct their faulty thinking at this stage he simply tells them that answers to such questions are not for them to know. These sorts of things are entirely in His Father's hand (v 7) instead they are to concern themselves with their task, which is the evangelisation of the world.

Of course in focusing their attention on the world it was a rebuke to their thinking of a restored Israel, for God is sending his Spirit so that these believing Jews will go into the world and evangelise both Jews and Gentiles. So what Jesus is saying is to speculate about times and dates is useless.

The Lord's return does not revolve around such speculation but around God's own purposes and those purposes include bringing salvation not just to the Jews but to Gentiles as well. Not just to Israel but to the whole world. Therefore the disciples must focus on their task of evangelism and when their task is complete and God's purpose of salvation for the world has been fulfilled then the Lord will return.

You could say to these disciples that if you really want to see the return of the Lord then get on with doing what you have been given power to do that is the evangelisation of the world.

Likewise sometimes the church today can have faulty thinking that affects its evangelism. For example there are some who believe that God will save his people whether we evangelise or not. Now there is some truth in that thinking but it is faulty because we are commanded to be his witness and to go into the world and preach the gospel and therefore to fail to do so is sin.

God in his wisdom has decided that the way that he will save his people is through the clear witness of his people by proclamation and through holy living. Because evangelism can be so difficult it is easy to adhere to faulty thinking like the one I have just mentioned rather than being prepared to put the time and effort into the proclaiming the gospel.

Jesus would say to people who have such faulty thinking and there are many others that I have not mentioned, it is God's task to save sinners, but it is our task to tell sinners they must be saved. It is so easy to allow faulty thinking to hinder the task that the church has been given which is to be his witness in our world.

## 2. THE CHURCH'S MISSION (v 8)

In many ways verse 8 is the key to the book of Acts. Now there are four geographical references in verse 8. In the NIV both Judea and Samaria are combined by the word "and" so that instead of having a four-part division the NIV sees only three. The reason for this is that in the Greek, Samaria does not have a definite article before it, whereas the other three locations do have.

It seems that because the article appears before Judea that Judea and Samaria belong together. This makes the commission in verse 8 three parts rather than four. Does it matter? Not really but I want to suggest that the three part commission is mirrored in this book of Acts. Acts 1-7 deals with the preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem and Acts 8-12 deals with the preaching in Judea and Samaria.

Finally Acts 13-28 records the expansion of the gospel throughout the Roman world. So what we have in verse 8 is the church's commission and what we see throughout the rest of the book is the commission being fulfilled.

What we see in Acts we should see in every local church. This is the pattern that every church is to establish; every church is a witness and proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus and its application for sinners. We are to proclaim that message where we are first and foremost. But we are not to be concerned only with our own locality but must do what we can to help the gospel to be proclaimed in other parts of our own country and Europe as well as in all the world. But how can a feeble bunch of people accomplish such a task.

The reason is that we are powerful people. That does not mean that we have influence and power to make people listen to us. But it means that we have the power of the Holy Spirit who is able to empower us to speak and explain the gospel and is capable of enabling sinners to listen and respond to that gospel presentation. As I said last week the word for power (v 8) is the word from which we get our word "dynamite."

This is explosive life changing power, which is at work through the people of God and through their proclamation of the word of God. Now there is no Christian who does not possess the power of the Holy Spirit. Each believer here today is powerful because we have the power of the Holy Spirit empowering us. We have no say whether we want this power or not we receive it when we come to faith in Christ for the Holy Spirit who is powerful takes up residence in our hearts and lives.

In the same way we do not get any choice of whether we want to be witnesses or not. The verse says "you will be my witnesses," we have the Holy Spirit within us who empowers us to witness we cannot help but be His witnesses but the only question is how effective is our witness. What do we witness too? We witness to what we know to be true by experience.

We know that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners because that is what he did in your life Christian. So today you and I are his witnesses. In that home and in that street and in that place of work and in that society that we belong to or that club that you go too.

We are witnesses to the truth of Jesus by our lives and by our words and every day we ought to pray that God will empower us by His Holy Spirit to be good witnesses to his truth. Now notice that what happens to our witness is not up to us. We are not told to go and witness and see people converted, we are told to be a witness. Only God can use our witness by the power of His Spirit and make it effective.

It is so easy to say to ourselves that because we have not led anyone to the Lord or no one seems to be affected by my witness that our witness is not effective. We cannot judge such things. Of course we ought to examine our lives constantly to see that there is no sin that is spoiling our witness but having done that and as long as we are seeking to walk consistently with God then we must leave the results of our witness with God.

That same power that helps us to witness is the power that can use our witness. Even if God never reveals to us the result of our witnessing we must fulfil this commission to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Now although physically our witness is limited to where we live and work etc. we must seek to do what we can as a church to encourage others to witness where they are. So we must pray for missionaries and churches in other countries. We must be willing to help them financially so that they can stay in the place where God has placed them and be His witnesses.

We must help churches in other parts of our country and Europe and the world to be effective witnesses of Jesus Christ through prayer and through practical help if necessary. We need a large vision we ought to be concerned for Wensleydale for that is where we have been placed but we also ought to be concerned that the gospel is proclaimed throughout our nation and further afield as well. We should rejoice when we hear of churches being established of people going to other countries to be a witness.

We should likewise be concerned when there are still many people groups that do not have a witness living among them speaking the gospel to them in their own language. We must pray for world evangelism, we must give financially to help it and we must even be prepared to go should God call us to be his witnesses in other countries.

That is what the church in Acts did and that is the pattern for every local church in our day. We are witnesses because we have the Holy Spirit but we are always commanded to be witnesses therefore let us fulfil his commission and be His witnesses wherever we are today and every day.

### 3. THE MOTIVE FOR EVANGELISM (vs. 9-11)

After Jesus had told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would give them power to witness Jesus was taken up before their very eyes until a cloud hid him from their sight (v 9). This disappearance of Jesus was very different from the ones he made during the 40 days after the resurrection. On those occasions he simply disappeared but here we have a public disappearance marking Jesus final disappearance.

This ascension marks the end of Jesus 40-day period when he appeared and convinced his followers that he was alive. It is a public exit from this world, designed to convey the idea of finality.

But to be truthful it is not with the physical act of ascension that Luke is interested in but with its meaning, its interpretation which is why he tells us about two men (angels) who came beside the disciples as they were gazing into the sky.

They tell the disciples to stop gazing into the sky for Jesus has left them and gone into heaven and will one day come back again in the way that they have seen him go, meaning it will be public and glorious.

By instructing his disciples to stop gazing into the sky the angels are giving a mild rebuke. They are saying the time to stop gazing and longing for Jesus physical presence is over, it is now time to get on with the task that you have been given which is to be his witness upon this earth. The time to be his witnesses has now come, now get on with it.

This is a challenge to us all for in our day some Christians are more interested in sky gazing than in evangelism. For some it is the sky watching for the Second Coming. They speculate and predict and come up with all sorts of fancy ideas about when it will be and how it will happen and about the various events leading up to that day.

They get so caught up in such sky gazing that they forget about their task to be witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ. They seem to forget about the millions who are lost without Jesus Christ.

Then there is the sky gazers who are sermon tasters, they sit under good ministry sometimes travel miles to hear the latest great preacher. They are continually looking for fresh insights into often minor points and all the time the world perishes and the sermon taster does not seem to care.

This sort of person is often very concerned for theological correctness and will pull up the preacher if his words are just not correct, yet he fails to do anything about those who are outside the church. Those who never hear sermons, those who do not know what is correct when it comes to truth.

I know they are two extreme examples that I have given and there are a whole host of others in-between those extremes. But the point of the ascension is that Jesus has left this world, for us the Spirit has come, His power is available therefore get on with the task of witnessing to the truth of Jesus Christ, of his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

If we need any motivation for this task of evangelism then the angels give it to us in their application of this ascension event. Jesus has left this world for now but one day he will return in a public declaration of his glory (v 11). In heaven at present He is carrying out his ministry of intercession, He is praying for us but one day he will return. At that time it will be too late to evangelise.

It will be too late to do anything about our family and friends and work colleagues that we have failed to witness too. At that time our sermon tasting and our speculations about his coming and our many other sky gazing activities will be seen for what they are. You see this is why Jesus ascends into heaven immediately after he commissions his disciples to go into the world and be his witnesses. The church's task here on earth until He returns is to be his witnesses. It is to proclaim as far as possible and to as many people as possible the good news of Jesus Christ. Of course we do need to hear sermons and be taught and to think about his Second Coming etc. But the purpose for all those things is to make us better witnesses.

Therefore there is no greater motive for godliness and evangelism than the fact that one-day our ascended Jesus will return but this time he is returning as Judge. Believers will then spend eternity with him in the new heaven and earth but what about the unbeliever. They will go to hell. How are we going to prevent that from happening?

By being his witnesses and then by praying that God by the power of His Holy Spirit will make our witness effect so that sinners will be transformed by the power of God. Then on that final day they too will enjoy all the bliss of our heavenly home.

But Jesus has not yet returned, so it is our task as a church and as individuals within the church to stop sky gazing and to get on with our task of being His witnesses in our world. We have all the resources that we need for we have the Holy Spirit and his power available to us. The task is a daunting one so we must rely upon God's resources and step out in faith and we must do as we are commanded and be his witnesses. Then we must pray and leave the result ultimately with God.

Amen