

Text: Acts 1: 1-11

Theme: Series-Jesus Christ and His Church (Acts of the Apostles): The Promise
Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Holy Communion Service on
10/04/2016 at 10.30am

Imagine what it would be like if the Book of Acts wasn't in the Bible. You pick up your Bible and see the ministry of Jesus ending in the Gospel of John; next you read about a man named Paul writing to the followers of Jesus in Rome. Who was Paul? How did the gospel get from Jerusalem to Rome? The Book of Acts answers these questions. "A great New Testament scholar has said that the title of Acts might be, 'How they brought the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome.'" (Barclay)

That expansion from Jerusalem to Rome is a remarkable story. "Humanly speaking, [Christianity] had nothing going for it. It had no money, no proven leaders, no technological tools for propagating the gospel. And it faced enormous obstacles. It was utterly new. It taught truths that were incredible to the unregenerate world. It was the subject of the most intense hatreds and persecutions." (Boice)

The Acts of the Apostles should therefore be studied mainly for this double purpose: first, to trace our Lord's unseen but actual *continuance of his divine teaching and working*; and, secondly, to trace the *active ministry of the Holy Spirit* as the abiding presence in the church." (Pierson)

The first verse of Acts of the Apostles intimates us with that fact; that it is a continuation of an earlier book, the Gospel according to Luke, and that the first volume of Luke's two-volume work dealt with all that Jesus **began to do and to teach** (Acts 1:1). This implies that the second volume, the book of Acts, will deal with what Jesus continues to do and to teach. **The book of Acts is not only the acts of the apostles, but the acts of the risen, living Jesus.**

Luke mentioned three things the apostles needed if they were to be the kind of instruments through which the living Jesus could do his work and speak his Word.

First, they needed a Spirit-authenticated commission or command from the Lord. Verse 2 says he gave them commands through the Holy Spirit.

Second, they needed verification that Jesus was really alive and triumphant over death. Verse 3a says that Jesus presented himself to them alive after his death with many proofs appearing to them for 40 days.

Third, they needed more instruction about the kingdom of God. Verse 3b says that he spent time during those 40 days between his resurrection and ascension speaking to them of the kingdom of God.

However, there is another utterly crucial thing that the apostles needed in order to be the most effective instruments in the hands of the living Jesus. They needed to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

"And while staying with them he charged 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 before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 1:4-5)

Some people say that promises were made to be broken. That might be reality in some relationships, but with God, this is not the case. When He makes a promise, He keeps it! When people make promises to Him, He expects them to keep those promises, with His help. Jesus told his disciples about a promise that God the Father had made. This takes us back to the gospels, when Jesus said that the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Jesus told them He would be leaving them, but they would not be alone. The Father would

send the Holy Spirit to comfort them and help them live out their lives for Him, not for themselves. Acts 1 speaks about this promise.

The risen Christ had commissioned the unstable apostles to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:19); but now, just before His ascension, He's telling them "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised". We must understand clearly what He was referring to, and how the promise of the Father related not only to them but to us. We will look at this promise under three questions: -

- 1. What was the promise of the Father?**
- 2. What is the purpose of the promise?**
- 3. Why did they have to wait for the promise?**

1. What was the promise of the Father?

It was the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit- one with the Father and the Son. In the Old Testament, we have instances of His coming upon men to empower them for special service: Gideon (Judges 6:34); Samson (Judges 14:19). The promise of the Father was the promise that the Holy Spirit would come at Pentecost to do a distinctive work in the lives **of all Christians; it was a promise relating to this period of time in which we are living, the Church Age.**

God had given this promise through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32); it was proclaimed by John the Baptist (John 1:29-34), and was referred to by the Lord Jesus Himself (John 7:37-39; John 14:16-17; John 15:26; John 16:6-7 and 13-14; and Acts 1:8. It was anticipated by the Lord after the Resurrection (John 20:22), and was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4).

2. What is the Purpose of the Promise?

The promise of the Father, then, was the promise that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit would come in a special way to do a three-fold work in the lives of all God's children.

a. He would come to baptise them all into the body of Christ. Jesus told His people they would be "baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). At Pentecost, when the Spirit came and filled the 120, they were up until then isolated units, but He united them into the body of Christ. Pentecost marked the formation of the Church, the body of Christ. By the baptism of the Spirit every Christian has been placed into the body of Christ.

b. He would come to live within them all. Notice in John 14:16-17 the words of Jesus which pointed forward to their fulfilment in Acts 2:4, when the Holy Spirit, who had been with them, would from thereon be in them - "for he lives with you and will be in you." The distinctive mark of a Christian is that he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and it is true of every Christian from the moment of believing on Christ, as these references show: John 7:39; Romans 5:5; Romans 8:8-9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

c. **He would come to empower them all.** In other words, Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 were fulfilled in the experience of these first disciples in Acts 2:4! - and we only have to read through the Book of Acts to see how wonderfully these early Christians were empowered when the Holy Spirit clothed them.

The Power of the Spirit Is Needed More than Knowledge of the time of Christ's return (Acts 1:6-8). The disciples wanted to know when Jesus would return but he cautioned them that "It is not for you to know...", but it is for you to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. **Knowing the timetable of the kingdom is not essential; however, doing the work of the kingdom in the power of the Spirit is of vital importance.**

We live in a knowledge-crazed world. People want to know what is going on. When we took our grandchildren to Bournemouth by train during the holiday, we were inundated with those 4 little words, "Are we there yet?" Well, that is the kind of question the disciples were asking. Jesus had been with them over a month now since His resurrection. As far as they knew, Jesus could bring everything to a close any moment now, and they would be with Him forever. However, they failed to see what God was really doing. There was still much to be accomplished on this earth. Jesus told them not to worry about things beyond their control. They would need all their focus on the task at hand. Jesus wanted them to go into all the world and tell every people and group about Him and the gift of eternal life He wanted to give to them. However, they would need some serious help doing this.

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**).

It was wise for Jesus not to outline His plan over the next 2,000 years. It was good for the disciples to not know the full restoration of the kingdom to Israel that they hoped would happen soon, would not come for some 2,000 years. It might overly discourage them in the work they had to do right then, and might make them think less of the aspect of the kingdom of God that was present with them.

At the same time, 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. The resurrected, ascended Jesus again showed His submission to the Father. His submission to the Father was not temporary, but eternal.

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**.

With their question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, it is possible that the disciples still saw **power** too much in terms of Caesar's kind of power, and not enough in terms of God's kind of power.

And you shall be My witnesses: 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 . . .** The words **shall be** being 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 programme for evangelism is of little effectiveness without the filling of the Holy Spirit.

In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth: The progress of the spread of the gospel message from **Jerusalem**, to **Judea and Samaria**, and then **to the end of the earth** becomes the outline of Acts.

Some scholars have identified 3 distinct functions of human beings: knowing, being, and doing. What you know is important. Jesus wasn't condoning ignorance by saying it was not for them to know. Paul also writes, "I would not have you to be ignorant." Knowing is important, but there are some things we will not know until they happen. One of those things is the time of Christ's return and the end of this age. Jesus said there would be signs that the end was near, but our concern is not the timing.

Our concern is with the task, and the power to do the task. So, Jesus elevates being and doing here. He said, "You will be My witnesses, after you receive power from the Holy Spirit."

What determines your identity? Who are you really? That is important, because who we are determines what we do. If I am a teacher, I teach. If I am a parent, I nurture and guide my children. If I am an athlete, I compete in sports. If I am one of Christ's witnesses, what do I do? I tell about Him. I provide a living testimony of what His love and power can do.

So, Jesus told the disciples, "... you need to be and do, by the power of the Holy Spirit." This power is what made them bold. This wasn't a time for being timid or afraid, it was a time to declare truth in love. The truth is that people need the Lord, and without Him they will not make heaven. The love is God's love that sent Jesus to be the sacrifice for the sins of mankind. If people never hear about this and are not brought to a place of response, then they will never make it to heaven, and they will never see their Creator.

So, we don't need to worry about the times; we just need to keep on being filled with the Spirit, and keep telling others about Jesus. This is the primary focus of the power we receive from the Holy Spirit. However, when we are full of God's Spirit, we can also know His power in other ways. We can lay hands on the sick and they will recover. We can take authority over the forces of darkness and evil that we come up against. We can see miracles, signs, and wonders. The Biblical pattern seems to be preaching and teaching God's word (the gospel) with signs following. Our enemy would love for us to settle for some anaemic variety of religion that keeps us from ever being a serious threat to him. However, the power of the Holy Spirit has a way of making us effective in reaching the lost and seeing lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Plan of the Spirit is to raise Empowered Believers Telling the World about Jesus (Acts 1:8). It takes all different kinds of people to spread the gospel! Some would be like Paul, others like Peter and in-between. The Spirit even used people who had failed at first, but who kept at it until they were effective to carry out His plan.

I sure need more of that power. How about you? Could you use a little help living out your faith and making a difference in those around you?

3. Why did they have to wait for the Promise?

They had to wait for God's time. No doubt the waiting time was a time of heart-searching and of earnest prayer (Luke 11:13) - but in God's calendar Pentecost had to come fifty days after the resurrection of Christ. They had to wait, in fulfilment of the Lord's promise.

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.

- 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.

We DO NOT have to wait for the Holy Spirit to baptise us into the body of Christ. What is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:13 has already taken place. This becomes a reality at the moment of conversion. Every believer is already baptised into the body of Christ. However, not every believer is filled with the Spirit.