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THE POWER TO WITNESS • The Holy Spirit

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 1:1-8

The book of Acts is the sequel to Luke. It opens with a greeting to Theophilus, who was also the intended recipient of Luke's gospel. In Acts 1:1 Luke references his "former book" and picks up where he left off. In this passage, Luke is restating the Great Commission challenge Jesus gave in Luke 24. Throughout the rest of the book, Luke shows how that command was being carried out, as the news of the gospel spread throughout "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In verse 4, Luke quotes Jesus as saying something that seems counter-intuitive at first glance, given the urgency of their task. Jesus had told the disciples to, "Go, and make disciples of all nations." But here he says, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about." It would seem that they should have gone with all haste to carry the news of the risen Savior to the ends of the earth. Understanding why they were to wait is the key to understanding this passage.

What Are You Waiting For?

The conversation Jesus is referencing is recorded in John 14-16. Take a second read through those chapters and then come back here for a bit of commentary. Pay special attention to John 14:25-15:8, and 15:26-16:16.

As you probably noticed, Jesus had a lot to talk about that night. Notice two topics that were prominent throughout his discourse: power and witnessing. In 15:1-8 He says over and over that there is no power, no fruitfulness, unless we are connected to Him:

- No branch can bear fruit in itself. It must remain in the vine. (15:4)
- Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (15:4)
- If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit. (15:5)
- Apart from me you can do nothing. (15:5)

And look how often he comments on how the Spirit will help us know and communicate truth:

- But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (14:26)

What's the Big Idea?

In this passage Luke shows Jesus' call to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and He specifies the power by which we must do this. The Holy Spirit is the source of that power, and in fact, is so indispensable that Jesus tells the disciples NOT to go tell people about Him until they are filled with the Spirit. We also need to be sure we are empowered by the Spirit, and then go tell people how they can begin a relationship with God through Christ.

What's the Problem?

Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit we have no capacity to influence people for Christ. All our efforts are in vain if He is not enabling us.

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- When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. And you also must testify. (15:26,27)
- When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. (16:7)
- But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. (16:13)

Keep that in mind and you'll see that what Jesus is about to say isn't anything new. It's just a recap of what He'd already taught the disciples.

Baptized with the Holy Spirit

Being baptized with the Spirit is synonymous with being filled with the Spirit. Both terms describe a person who has surrendered his or her life to Christ and is being controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

When that happens the power and ability to witness begins to flow. As we are filled with the Spirit, He teaches us what to say, He gives supernatural power to our words so they will actually have an effect, and He convicts the people we are speaking to of their guilt and need for a savior. Only the Spirit can open a person's eyes to see his or her deplorable condition before God. As He does, the gospel message comes with power to hearts He has prepared.

According to Jesus, the power that the Spirit provides is absolutely critical to the success of the mission. Without the Spirit and His power, the disciples were to do nothing. In fact, according to John 15:4-5, without His power they couldn't have done anything even if they wanted. Rather than try and fail, Jesus told them to wait for the Spirit to come upon them.

In verses 6-7, Luke interrupts the logical flow of the passage to show how the disciples' focus was off. Jesus responds to their question about the Kingdom of Israel by directing their attention back to the kingdom of heaven, and is more explicit: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (v. 8).

We are given that power so that we can tell people about Jesus, enabling them to know Him, too. There is no point to having the power of the Holy Spirit, if we aren't sharing the gospel. And there is no point in sharing the gospel, if we don't have the Spirit's power.

The critical thing for you to communicate is that great power is available to us in the Holy Spirit. By faith, we can be filled with the Spirit and receive supernatural power to be His witnesses as He has commanded. As we avail ourselves of this power, God will use us as He changes people's lives for all eternity.

What's Our Response?

Help the people in your study see their need for the power that the Holy Spirit can give. Encourage them to read through the article, "How to Witness in the Spirit" and receive the Spirit's power by faith.

End 

What Are the Questions?

Acts 1:1-8

LAUNCH

If I were to tell you we are going to cancel Bible study and go sharing right now, how would you feel? Excited, frightened, intimidated? Why?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 1:1-4.

1. What is the “former book” to which the author is referring?
2. Who is Theophilus?
3. In Matthew 28, the command given is: “Go, and make disciples....” Here, Jesus says, “Do not leave, but wait....” Why weren’t the disciples supposed to go and go quickly?
4. Where had the disciples heard Jesus speak about this gift before?

Read John 14:25-15:8 and 15:26-16:16.

5. What was the gift?
6. What are some of the themes you notice being repeated?

7. What is Jesus’ main point in John 15:1-8?

8. List all the times Jesus mentions the Spirit in reference to our knowing and communicating the truth.

Read Acts 1:5-8

9. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?

10. Why did the disciples ask about the Kingdom of Israel? How did Jesus respond?

11. What will the Holy Spirit give them? For what purpose?

12. What will they be able to do before the Spirit comes?

13. How does the Spirit empower us to witness?

APPLY

14. Have you ever felt powerless while talking to people about Jesus?

17. When was the last conversation you had with a non-Christian concerning Jesus?

15. Jesus speaks of this power as a gift. Sometimes it may feel like a gift we’d like to exchange. Do you want this power? What is attractive or repulsive to you about the gift?

18. What does that suggest to you about the reality of the Spirit’s power in your life?

16. How are you experiencing His power in your life right now?

What Are the Answers?

1. The former book is Luke.
2. The name means “lover of God.” It was either a literal individual, or a figurative way to address all who love God.
3. They were lacking something necessary to accomplish the task—namely, the Holy Spirit.
4. The disciples had heard Jesus speak of this gift in John 14-16 among other places.
5. The gift is the Holy Spirit.
6. Allow the group to discuss. Two of the major themes are power and witnessing.
7. We can do nothing if we are not connected to Him.
8. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (14:26)

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the

Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. And you also must testify. (15:26,27)

When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. (16:7)

But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. (16:13)

9. It is synonymous with being filled with the Spirit. Both describe a person who is yielded to Christ, and empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit.
10. Their focus was on earthly things, not the heavenly kingdom. Jesus very graciously redirected their focus back to the critical task before them.
11. The Holy Spirit will give them power, so they can effectively tell people about Christ.
12. They are not able to do anything.
- 13.-18. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

A POWERFUL WITNESS • Evangelism

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 4:1-22

This passage is one of several great examples of Acts 1:8 being fulfilled. There, Luke recorded Jesus' promise: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses..." In Acts 4, he records one of the many times it was fulfilled. Over and over again in the book of Acts, and throughout the history of the church, this promise is lived out. The same is true today in the lives of Spirit-filled believers all over the world. When we yield our lives to Christ, confess our sins, and trust the Spirit of God to fill us, He empowers us to do great things for Him.

The events of the previous chapter are an important context for this chapter. Be sure to read both chapters three and four in preparation for this study. In chapter three, John and Peter healed a beggar who had been crippled for years. They used the opportunity to call their hearers to repentance and faith as they testified to the great power of the resurrected Jesus, and His willingness to forgive.

In chapter four, we see the power of the Holy Spirit on display in the apostles' lives. The religious leaders of the day are "greatly disturbed" because of this miracle and the preaching that followed it. Therefore, they arrest and jail Peter and John, hoping to intimidate them into silence, and quell the growth of this movement. They fail on both counts. The number of believers continues to increase to more than 5,000, up from only 120 at Christ's ascension! Peter and John speak boldly before their accusers, beginning the fulfillment of another promise Luke recorded in Luke 21:12-15:

They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

As Peter and John testify of the gospel, the leaders of the day, are astonished by their courage. They can't make sense of their bold, powerful witness. Confronted with incontrovertible evidence of a miracle, and men who can not be intimidated, they vainly order the apostles to stop speaking about Jesus. They probably aren't surprised by the response: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19,20).

What's the Big Idea?

Acts 1:8 promises that God will give power to believers so that they can speak about Jesus in a supernatural way. Not only will they have extraordinary courage, but their words will also have great effect. This passage is an example of that being lived out by the apostles. It is meant as an encouragement to us so that we would rely on the Holy Spirit and experience the thrill of being His witnesses.

What's the Problem?

There are many things that can keep us from sharing the gospel, including fear or our own disinterest. Without the Spirit of God living in and empowering us we're unable to overcome the hindrances.

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What Are the Answers?

1. They prayed, affirmed God's sovereignty, and cast lots, trusting Him to give direction through the "lots."
2. Allow the group to discuss what they see in each passage.
3. God is leading in a more direct, personal, and dynamic way.
4. We don't know for sure. It may have been through a mental impression, vision, or he may have simply felt compelled in the realm of his emotions.
5. Allow the group to discuss.
6. The most important thing is to desire to live for God's will with all of our heart. We can always make the clues God provides say what we want it to say, if we don't desire His will above all.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. They had to decide whether or not the Gentiles needed to follow all of the Mosaic Law. They listened to testimony, and deliberated on what they should do. They pondered what God had been doing in the circumstances of Paul's ministry, they prayed, counseled together, and used wisdom to make a decision.
9. God desires us to use all of the different means of discerning His will. If he always provided a vision, we would never grow in wisdom or other critical areas.
10. It is a way to cross-check our detective work, as well as guard against the deceit of our own hearts.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. Often sensing God's leading is more subjective. The Scriptures are much clearer, and God would not lead us to do anything contrary to His Word. All other sensing must be subjugated to the authority of Scripture.
13. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:1-2

Cru.Comm is the small group material for Campus Crusade for Christ's Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We'd love to hear your feedback on this study. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org

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