

Ultimate Questions, “Is It Now You Will Restore the Kingdom?”
Acts 1:1-9, Chris Faith, BCF, Oct 31, 2010

Did you hear about the guy that bought a new shrub trimmer but he had a terrible time trying to trim his bushes. His old hand saw worked way better. He tried hacking at the branches, no good. He also tried sawing but it didn't cut at all. When he finally took it back the Sears guy plugged it in, and he asked, “What's that noise?”

The same thing happens in the Christian life. Many believers are living a powerless Christian life, even though they have the resources they need to live filled with joy and love. They wonder how it can be so hard. The Christian life is not merely hard, it's downright impossible in our own power. But we have good news! We have a power source that enables us to conquer sin, to live in love, and to walk in joy. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, has come, and wants to use us to change the world with the Good news of Jesus Christ.

Today we continue our study on “Ultimate Questions, Q and A with Jesus” and consider the very last question the disciples asked Jesus before He took off for glory. They asked if the time had finally come for the kingdom to be established.

In Acts 1, Luke tells his friend Theophilus about what happened after Jesus' resurrection. You see, only about seven weeks before, the disciples had been with Jesus as He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. They suspected Jesus would establish His kingdom then, but by the end of that week they beheld their beloved Lord nailed dying on a Roman cross.

On that Good Friday, their hopes were shattered. Their hearts were crushed. But Sunday came. Yes, Sunday came and Jesus rose from the grave. He defeated sin and death and hell. He is the King of glory and the first fruit of those alive from the dead.

Jesus rose, and for forty days showed His disciples convincing proof that He is alive. During that time He taught them about the kingdom, so it's no surprise why they thought that would be an ideal time for Jesus to establish His kingdom.

They wanted Rome overthrown. They wanted to sit in honor and for Jesus to reign over all the earth. But they were ignorant of what God was about to do. They didn't realize that God was soon to begin the most exciting chapter **yet** in God's redemption plan. They were on the eve of the powerful birth of a whole new dynamic entity which would change the course of history. The Church was about to be born.

Let's open our Bibles to Acts 1 and listen into the conversation as Luke shares with his friend Theophilus. Acts 1:1-9.

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,

3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;

5 "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 ¶ *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

7 *And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.*

8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

9 *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*

SHALL WE PRAY?

Here we see Jesus, as He shares his last words before He departed to glory. He gave us three instructions regarding life in the age of the Church. **FIRST, He commands us to a new practice. 2. He informs us of a new power, and THIRDLY. He gives us a new plan.** He commands us to a new practice. 2. He informs us of a new power, and THIRDLY. He gives us a new plan.

First he calls Christians to a new practice. Listen again to Jesus command in v. 4. *"He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me."*

Our new practice is prayer. We are to wait before God and seek Him to fulfill His promises. Now, some wonder whether this command was only for the apostles. The answer is clearly no. This command is for all believers. You remember when the Holy Spirit fell there were 120 disciples gathered together waiting for that which the Father had promised. All Jesus' disciples understood it was also for them that the Lord has given this command.

Now, today we don't apply this verse literally, but in principle. That is to say we need not take a trip to Israel to pray in Jerusalem. Today we are to wait in our own Jerusalem: which means wherever we happen to be. God has commanded we wait and watch and pray, where we are. God wants you to find a quiet place, perhaps a secret place, and wait in prayer for God's promises.

Notice the direction of our prayer. Jesus told them to wait for the promise of the Father. And this is very important in prayer. We need to study this book, to understand and to claim all that the Father has promised us as His beloved children. You see, it's not enough to simply know God's promises. We need to pray for them, to seek them and to claim them by faith. By prayerfully trusting in the promises of God we tap into His almighty transforming power for our lives.

Many believers live powerless lives. Perhaps you are one of them. Is your life or your home void of Christian joy? Are you ensnared by some pattern of sin? Are you taking your thoughts captive to the knowledge of Christ, or are you plagued by self condemnation and distress? Are your words critical, destructive, or discouraging, or do your lips bless God and men?

If you lack God's power, He has a better way for you. He does not want you to continue in a desert place. He doesn't want darkness and distress to characterize your life. O No, dear one. He wants you to employ prayer as a weapon of warfare. He wants you to grow strong in Christ. The practice of prayer strengthens the Christian.

This is why Jesus commands us to wait on God. He wants us to seek Him, to watch and wait, to eagerly expect all that the Father has promised us.

You see, the Father-who loves you infinitely, has promised to fill you, and to bless you with His Holy Spirit. Jesus did not die on the cross to leave you orphans. He didn't give his life on Calvary's cross to grant you simple "fire insurance." The Lord of glory became fully man, lived a sinless life, died and rose again the third day as the Lamb of God, to free you from the chains of sin, and to give you **abundant life**- a life filled with joy and power from God.

O precious ones, you will not experience the righteousness of God until you hunger and thirst for His righteousness. And when you begin to long to experience His righteousness more than you long for the pleasures and preoccupations of this world, then you will wait and pray. You will wait with eager expectation for all that the Father has promised us through His beloved Son. And in that process you will be changed.

Why are we satisfied with so little? Why do we accept a life that is virtually indistinguishable from the people who don't know God? What keeps us from expecting God to act like the Almighty? Where is our faith?

God wants to fill you with light. And if you are a Christian His light is already in you. He has come by His Holy Spirit to indwell you. But there are many moments when light of His love and grace flickers so dimly. God wants to get the obstructions out of the way. He wants to cleanse the stains from our garments. He desires to fill you with His overcoming power. In II Cor. 4:6-7 Paul declares, *"For God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness' is the One who has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels so that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves."* 2 Cor. 4: 6-7.

Jesus has given us a new practice. Now, I use the word practice, because we need to. We need to practice prayer. And like anything we practice, we will grow more familiar, more at ease, more confident merely by the practice of prayer. Jesus, upon His departure, commanded His children to wait for the Father's promises.

This matter of Pentecost, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is both simple and complex. We need to pray. We need to practice prayer. We need God's power to live lives that bring glory to His name, which will only happen as we spend extended times with God in prayer.

You see, the Holy Spirit fell on Pentecost, in fulfillment of the Father's promise, but He has also fallen in other times in the history of the church, bringing seasons of great refreshment, seasons of powerful advance in world evangelization, and times of revival.

Michael Brown, in his book entitled "What Happened to the Power of God" comments that Richmond, VA. in 1986 had the highest per capital murder rate in the nation, over one homicide a day. One Christian leader realized the spiritual component of this travesty, so he gathered together a great throng of believers and Christian leaders for daily early morning prayer. After two weeks of prayer, the group began to pray directly against the spiritual forces of darkness controlling the city. From that day, for the next 28 days there were no murders in Richmond. A high ranking police officer commented that he didn't know what made for the change but he encouraged it continue. Sadly, enthusiasm for the morning prayer waned, and the murder rate returned, but those who had prayed evidenced God's power.

Our modern missionary movement began by a prayer movement in Wales that spawned the great Welsh revival just over a century ago. Conservative estimates say over

100,000 people were converted in that work of God. The Holy Spirit did not begin to move because of great preaching, but because God's people prayed. In February 1904, a teenage girl from Cardigan, named Florrie Evans, during a youth prayer meeting declared she loved Jesus with all her heart, and a fire of God's love fell on the group, and quickly spread to other young people across the region.

Evan Roberts, a young minister from Glamorgan, Wales, began in his preaching to encourage people to be open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Within two weeks the Welsh Revival was national news.

I want to invite you today to begin, or to continue to spend more time in prayer, and ask for the promise of the Father. Be open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Let's pray more at home. Let us gather in small groups and beg God for the Holy Spirit to bring glory to the Son, and to fill us with His love. He wants to bless you, dear one. He wants to use you and fill you with His grace. He wants our lives to be characterized by intimacy with God and a confidence in our daily walk. This will only come through prayer. This is the New Practice of the New Covenant believer.

SECONDLY, Jesus spoke of a NEW POWER. Read with me again in Acts 1:8. In Acts 1:8 *Jesus declared, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witness, in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth."*

The apostles asked if the time had come for the kingdom to be established, and Jesus said, no. The time hasn't come for the kingdom, but the time has come for His Church to be established. We are now in this glorious new chapter of God's redemption plan. We are in the age of the Holy Spirit.

Some have called the book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles, but we could more appropriately call it the Acts of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit has come in a new and dynamic way.

God's power flows from the indwelling Holy Spirit, who has come to transform our lives, from natural to supernatural, from carnal to spiritual, from self seeking to seeking God's glory and the advance of His kingdom.

God wants you to be aware of the spiritual reality of this world. On Nov 1 the Roman Church celebrates All Saints day. Ruffians chose the evening before as a mockery to celebrate evil and revelry. We call it Halloween. Many commemorate the spirits of dead men, and the powers of darkness. While the spirits of the deceased don't dwell on earth, there **are** demons moving about, real spiritual beings who seek to kill, deceive and destroy. Demons can inhabit places and plague people, whether that be Christiansburg Middle School or Galilee. But when we become God's child, the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us, and in the name of Jesus Christ we are more than conquerors. We need not be afraid of demons, but trust in the mighty name of the Lord Jesus. Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. And Acts 1:8 outlines the advance of the Holy Spirit's work.

Acts 1:8 is the both the theme and the outline of the entire book of Acts, and practically, this to be the theme of our lives, as members of the New Testament Church. This is Jesus' heart, so it only makes sense as we seek to become more like Him, this will be our heart as well. He died and rose again, not simply for our eternal destiny, but that today, in this world, we might experience the wonder of being the temple of God, to

know the shining glory of God, radiating from our our lives, and like a clean mirrors reflecting the beauty of Christ.

We are so much like Jesus' disciples. They wanted to get on with the festivities. They wanted to sit on thrones and reign with the Lord. They wanted comfort, convenience, and conflict free living. But Jesus had something far greater in mind, both for them and for us. He calls them higher. He stirs them to wait for a greater power than they had ever experienced. God was about to pour out the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and they would be chosen channels of God's power and love to reach all nations. Today we are that channel of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knew that life in the Holy Spirit would exceed their wildest expectations. They would be changed by the Holy Spirit's powerful presence. Jesus said, "you shall receive power" and the Holy Spirit's power has changed the course of history.

Think from their frame of reference. Before the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, Jesus' followers were a very small sect of a small faith of a small nation on the east of the Mediterranean. On the world scene, they were hardly a speck. But God poured out His Holy Spirit on those men and women. And this good news has and is reaching across the globe. The gospel is advancing against the powers of darkness.

We need the power of the Holy Spirit, because we are engaged in a spiritual conflict of global proportions. We are at war with the forces of darkness, and we cannot advance in our own power. Our enemy, Satan, works tirelessly to impede the work of God and to destroy a society built on truth and grace. And in this nation we are losing ground on many fronts.

Our families are coming unglued. Divorce in the church is now higher than in the general population. Hollywood for the most part spews out poison and trash, which we buy then feed to our children. Our culture teaches that extramarital sex is acceptable, and nearly 40 % of all children in the US are born to unwed mothers. That rate has more than doubled since 1980. Public schools teach our children that there is no truth, no absolutes, no solid moral ground to stand on. As a matter of fact, the negative social implications of our accepted moral vacuum are so severe that even secular scholars are recognizing the need to rethink the place of morality in education.

But the Holy Spirit comes with power. And He wants to move powerfully among us today. An article on the Welsh Revival stated, "A storm hit the churches, yet for many it was a storm of love and power which completely transformed their lives. People were changed in so many ways. The crime rate dropped, drunkards were reformed, pubs reported losses in trade. Bad language disappeared and never returned to the lips of many. Even **football and rugby** became uninteresting in the light of new joy and direction received by the Converts."

That is the music of revival! Imagine Blacksburg where people were more concerned with spiritual life and their eternal destiny than they are about Hokie Football. We are talking about revival and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dear ones, God wants to manifest His power through you. Some people wonder if God is still active today. When we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit they will see God's power. They will hear testimonies of answered prayer. They will sense the fragrant aroma of Christ among us. They will perceive His love, be convicted of sin, and know that God is in our midst. These are normal qualities of living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

People wonder how to get more of the Holy Spirit. The real problem is rather the contrary. The Holy Spirit needs to get more of us. D.L. Moody had this to say, *"I firmly believe that the moment our hearts are emptied of selfishness and ambition and self-seeking and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will come and fill every corner of our hearts; but if we are full of pride and conceit, ambition and self-seeking, pleasure and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. I also believe that many a man is praying to God to fill him, when he is full already with something else. Before we pray that God would fill us, I believe we ought to pray that He would empty us. There must be an emptying before there can be a filling; and when the heart is turned upside down, and everything that is contrary to God is turned out, then the Spirit will come..."*

Does this speak to you? Is there a need for you to be emptied of something that is getting in the way of the Holy Spirit's fullness in your life? So we've considered Jesus' instruction that first, **He commands us to a new practice. Second, He informs us of a new power, and Thirdly, He gives us a new plan.** Let's read again Acts 1:8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth."*

Jesus' new plan, which began on Pentecost, is to reach the world through our witness. Jesus says, "you shall be My witnesses." This is our business. This is our commission. This is our task while we tarry on this planet before glory. Now, I say new, not because the Lord didn't want to reach the world before. But we have a new direction: before the direction was for people to come into Jerusalem. But now direction has reversed. Now, in the age of the Holy Spirit, Jesus calls us to a new direction. The direction is **OUT FROM JERUSALEM TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.**

Jesus said we are the salt **of the earth** and the light **of the world**, which means it's time to wake up, to shake the shaker and let the light shine to the ends of the earth, both near and far. We are God's tool to reach the world with the good news of eternal life in Christ.

I can't tell you how grateful I am to be a part of this fellowship, because this **is our commission.** What a joy that our humble fellowship is reaching into S Africa, into North Korea, into the far east, and into the inner cities, into the university and into the neighborhoods where we live. The Holy Spirit is on the move, but He wants more of us.

Jesus commanded us to be His witnesses. This is His plan to reach the world. We can't change the world. That is not our calling. But we can speak and act boldly, and watch as the Holy Spirit changes the world by the foolishness of the message preached.

This is how God works. When we testify of Christ and tell people what Jesus has done to save us, when we tell others our testimony, the real changes God's Holy Spirit has made in our lives, then people are drawn to God, and pass from death to life. Men and women are delivered from sin and freed from guilt and shame. Marriages are healed. Those enslaved to alcohol and sexual sin are washed and made new. Folk who live sad, empty lives begin to sing with joy. When we show them the glory and the beauty of Christ people weep, but not from sorrow. They weep from joy, from knowing a love they have never known before. They experience the delight of knowing God and experience peace with their Creator, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “YOU shall be my witnesses... in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth.” When we experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit we will find ways, creative ways to become active agents in taking this glorious news of salvation to those who don’t know Christ.

God’s New Covenant Plan, His plan for your life, is to pour **through your life, and through your lips** this message of eternal life.

May I give you a few practical suggestions. (SLIDE)

1. Find a friend or two and covenant to pray for God to move in new ways in and around us.
2. Read books on revival and begin to ask God to do it again.
3. Seek God to give you a more serious view of sin, a greater vision of Him and a deeper love for Christ. Ask God to empty you of sin and self.
4. Ask the Holy Spirit daily to fill you afresh and use you in His power for God’s glory.
5. Tell someone about Christ. Find someone and share your testimony with him. Get into this good habit!

Today the Holy Spirit invites you let Him turn your life upside down and let all those things that block or grieve Him to just fall out, so that He can fill every room, shine into every corner of your life. He invites you to do your part in God’s New Covenant plan, to become witnesses to Jesus death and resurrection, so that many might be saved.

This is God’s invitation today. Will you spend more time with Him? Will you look for ways, for places, for people with whom you can meet and pray? The Holy Spirit wants to fill you, but you must make space for Him. Will you do that today?

Jesus, the eternal Son has commanded you to be His witness. This is His plan for you. He wants you to know the Holy Spirit’s power, and feel His joy as you tell others about our blessed Savior. Will you decide to be His witness starting here, and are you willing to go to the ends of the earth? Will you say, “Yes Lord.” Here am I. Send me.”

Jesus told the disciples they wouldn’t know the timing of His coming, but they would receive power by the coming of the Holy Spirit. He gave them a NEW PRACTICE, Told them of a NEW POWER, and gave them a NEW PLAN.

Let’s pray.