

"What Spirit Empowered Disciples Do"

Acts 1:1-11

I think I can say with some certainty that on the eve of Dec. 31st, 2020, many people had great expectations for 2021. I remember hearing people say and in the media, things like, '2020 – Good riddance!' or 'I'll be glad when 2020 is behind us.' Yet here we are, over two months into 2021 still battling Covid, still can't travel or go visit people in hospitals and nursing homes, we still can't all meet together in doors as a church, still wearing masks, washing our hands, etc. But it is only March. Let's not give up quite yet. Don't let go of greater expectations.

I'm sure the 11 apostles had great expectations when Jesus had risen from the dead. Luke opens Acts with the resurrected Jesus still around, still teaching His disciples and He's made some promises about the Holy Spirit coming. To the ears of His followers these are hope-filled words giving them great eschatological expectations about the near future. Because Acts 1:1-11 is really about the expectation of the return of Jesus. Yet Acts 1:1-11 will show us that we don't always get what we hope for; sometimes we get even more!

From our introduction two weeks ago in the book of Acts, we remember that Acts is really part two of the Luke-Acts narrative. It's really one book written to a Roman official named Theophilus to talk about the work of Jesus. We're not sure who Theophilus was. The name means lover of God. Perhaps he was a Gentile believer with a prominent position in Roman government who was going to help Luke and other Christians prove to Rome that Christianity was no threat so that persecution of Christians might stop. Or that the apostle Paul who was in prison, might be freed. Most likely one or both of these scenarios.

Yet if you and I were Roman officials, who need convincing that followers of Jesus are not a threat to over-power Rome and run the world themselves, our ears perk up at this talk about Jesus' kingdom. The disciples want to know essentially when these things are going to happen and Jesus assures them it will (one day) and you will get power, but a better kind of power (Holy Spirit power) that will still result in taking over the world, but not with force. So if the disciples were sharpening their swords now that they know their leader Jesus, can't be killed, Jesus says you're going to need different power to do things my way.

Since you and I have also received this power when we were baptized in the Spirit at salvation, what is it that Jesus wants us Spirit-empowered disciples to do? The Book of Acts shows us many things but we'll start here in vv.1-11 with two main things Jesus expects from us.

Luke begins part II by reminding Theophilus why he wrote his book. That Luke was about all that "*Jesus began to do and teach until He was taken up into heaven.*" And now even in His resurrection appearances Jesus was still teaching His disciples particularly about the Kingdom of God and proving the reality of the resurrection. And before chapters end he will have ascended. And He hasn't been seen since and so He hasn't returned to establish His kingdom. However, perhaps the most difficult thing Spirit empowered disciples of Jesus need to do is

Believe Jesus is Working Here and Now

(1:1-3)

Sometimes its easy to see how He's working in the world. We hear of many people in China accepting Christ or the gospel exploding in Africa or we even hear about a friend's church in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa that's growing and making an impact in their community but we struggle with seeing Jesus here and now. But if Luke says he wrote about "*all that Jesus began to do and teach*" then he's implying Jesus is still working and teaching. How?

In us and through us (vv. 1-2)

If the work and teaching of Jesus continued in Acts even after Jesus ascended to heaven, then two things are true. Jesus is still working (as He said He and His Father are always working now, John 5:17). And He's doing it through all His disciples by the power of the Spirit. The night before He died Jesus said when He leaves He will send the Spirit who will be in us and who will remind us of the things Jesus taught.

Paul says in Eph. 1:13 that when we believed the gospel, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit. His ministry through the disciples of reminding us what we've been taught about Jesus is the same. He enables us to speak boldly for Jesus and to use His gifts in us to serve one another and share the message. Since the Spirit dwells in us we have Jesus' power to help each other and our church family grow spiritually and numerically as we pray for and reach our community with the Word. Each one of us heard the gospel through another Spirit-empowered follower of Jesus. That was Jesus working through that person.

Luke says Jesus gave "*many convincing proofs that He was alive ... appearing to them over a period of 40 days and speaking to them of the Kingdom of God.*" Another way we show we believe Jesus is working here and now is

By giving the evidence of His life – in us (v.3)

Yes, Jesus Himself gave evidence that He was alive but don't we also give evidence that we believe Jesus is alive now when we tell people about Him and speak about His future return and reign? Of course we do. That's what 'be my witnesses' means. We testify that Jesus was the Son of God who lived a sinless life, yet purposefully died in our place for our sins. Proved He was God's Son and had defeated the power of sin (death) by rising from the grave. We testify that He's alive by being willing to be harassed and ridiculed for what we believe in. The word 'witness' is the Greek word for martyr. By witnessing to the fact that Jesus is not dead but fully alive and stating that we live by His words that He'll return to right all the wrongs even suffering, we show we are His witnesses.

We give evidence and provide many convincing proofs that Jesus is alive when we choose to live for Him. By making decisions in agreement to His Word as if He were actually here telling us to do these things – which in fact He is, through the Holy Spirit. Our willingness to make decisions for Jesus and talk about Jesus is not just our will-power but through the Spirit's power. We believe in Him. We agree to talk about Him. The Spirit gives us courage to do so because we know its true and we believe we have eternal life as a result of our faith.

So once Jesus ascends to heaven and the Holy Spirit comes on the apostles, they do exactly

as Jesus commanded and modelled – they give many convincing proofs that he is alive and teach about the assurance of His promises and His future return.

Now His future return is very much on the apostles' minds. On many occasions they discussed these things in the Gospels, often from the perspective that if the Messiah is here then the kingdom must soon come, therefore Jesus will beat up the bad guys and make life wonderful for Israel, as is promised in the prophets. And especially now since He's come back from the dead. Who's going to defeat Jesus now? So one day when Jesus is eating with them (v.4),

he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." ⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Give the disciples credit for asking this question because as Jesus has been teaching on the Kingdom of God and says wait for the Holy Spirit, the disciples know the Messiah's coming to rule is accompanied with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel (Is. 44:3; Jer. 30-33; Ezek. 36:27-28; Joel 2:28-32; Zech 12:10) to give them new hearts, hearts that will turn to God once and for all and they will live in the their land with peace and security.

Here's the thing that most people miss when they look at Jesus' answer. Some people think that Jesus rebukes the disciples and says the Kingdom won't come literally but only spiritually. That's not what He says at all. He doesn't rebuke them – and we know from the gospels Jesus had to do this many times. But not here. Matter of fact, just the opposite. Jesus tells us that Spirit-empowered disciples

Are Waiting for Jesus' Rule and Return **(1:4-11)**

And now He explains how we are to wait. We need to wait for His return and rule like the original 11,

Anticipating it could be soon (vv.4-7)

The disciples had listened to Jesus teach on His kingdom and so they expected now that He had risen that it must be soon. Jesus affirms that His Kingdom will come because the Father has "set by His own authority" [aorist tense in Greek means its an accomplished fact] we just don't know the 'season' or specific 'date'.

40 years later the apostle Peter was still teaching believers *You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. (2 Pet. 3:11-14)*

And Paul would write in 1 Thes. 5

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.... ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

And John as well, another 20 years later writes in 1 John 3

²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Every believer should look forward to, be encouraged by and fix our hope on the Lord's return. It will happen. His promises are true. This would have been the perfect place to verify that His kingdom for Israel was not going to happen the way the Old Testament taught. Instead Jesus you're right, but not now. When God finishes His program for the church at the end of the 70th week of Daniel, when all the world will surround Israel to wipe them out under the influence of the Antichrist, Jesus will return (as he left) to the Mount of Olives (where he left from) and the remnant of Israel will have a spiritual awakening when the Holy Spirit will miraculously save them all (Rom. 11:25), which will only be 1/3 of the nation who survive the tribulation (Zech. 13:7-9). However, Jesus said, you will only have to wait a few days to see the Holy Spirit power to be poured out into your hearts and in others hearts when you (and I)

Witnessing of His past, present & future (v.8a)

Don't miss this. V.8 is not a new sentence. It is Jesus' answer to when will He restore the Davidic Kingdom to Israel. 'It's not for you to know when but you will receive power to be my witnesses. The disciples were looking for two kinds of power. Political power over the Romans but also the Spiritual renewal of the entire nation when the Messiah would return. And Jesus says 'You have to wait for My political and literal return but you don't have to wait to see how the Holy Spirit's power to change hearts. And He'll do that as you give witness that I am alive and desire people to repent of their sins and believe in Me, by faith, as you have.'

This is another way we show we believe Jesus will return, by telling people He can save us from our sin and promises us a great future under His reign. When we witness to people about what Jesus has done for us we also testify as to what He can do for us. We show our faith in His promises regarding our future which is eternally linked to His own. And where are we to be His witnesses?

Impacting those parts of the world He directs us (v.8b)

Our Jerusalems (right where we live), our Judea (with the people who share our same nationality and background (Canadians) as well as our Samarias (people of different cultures who live within our country) and of course to anywhere in the world that we have the opportunity to impact.

While that includes some who will go to a foreign country and share the gospel, it also includes us supporting these people with our resources and prayer. Through the missionaries we support and pray for as a church we are joining the witnessing work in France, Israel, Uruguay, Peru, Uganda, Zambia, Lebanon, Honduras on top of our ministries to Quebec, first nations in Manitoulin, Jewish people in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto and locally through lawah, Ellel and our the local communities.

The longer Jesus takes to return the more difficult it can be to anticipate His "soon" return. In vv.9-11 we see Jesus ascend to His Father in heaven and the disciples watching His leaving. While

the angels will encourage them to move along, there is something to take away from that. Spirit-empowered disciples show we're waiting for Jesus' return by

Meditating on His future promises (vv.9-10)

The disciples watched Him go and were in awe of that moment. Let's not just skip over those passages about the future but let's take time to meditate on them. To be encouraged by them. To study what we can about His return. However, we can't just do that all the time as the angels tell the disciples to stop standing there and only mediating on His return. Implying, do what he says and get ...

Serving until He's arrived (or we're done!) (v.11)

This Jesus will come back in the same way He left – again pointing us to specific prophecies about His coming back to the Mt. Olives in person (see Zech. 14). But, implied here is, 'You don't have to worry about when or be there when it happens; serve Him with your life because that's the best witness you can be that you believe He'll come back'. We don't just serve out of what he did for us in the past but because we know what He'll do for us in the future. Why would we serve Him here or tell others about Him if we didn't believe He was coming back?

So the ministry of being Jesus' witnesses continues by the Spirit's power because we know He's coming back. We wouldn't have the Spirit if He wasn't returning nor would we have the Spirit if He hadn't left. And that brings us back to expectations. The disciples were expecting Jesus to set up His rule then and there. But Jesus said, not yet but you will get power, a power that will enable you to serve Me in ways you never knew you could. They got more than what they expected. As we go through Acts we see how the Spirit changed Peter, Paul, John, Philip and so many more. That same Spirit dwells in you and me if we know Christ.

Whether 2021 proves to be better than 2020, I don't know. But let's make sure our expectations are based on what God is enabling us to do through His Spirit. People are anxious, depressed and worried about the future. We don't need to be. Our future is secure in Jesus. Let's make sure we help people have better expectations about their own life and future by allowing the Spirit to empower us to be Jesus' witnesses here and wherever He leads us.

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