

Jesus' Perfect Provision for an Extraordinary Task

Acts 1:1-8

We're beginning a new series this morning in *Acts*, which is one of my favorite books in the Bible. It's full of interesting stories, astonishing events, and fascinating details about the origin and growth of the Christian movement and how the first believers lived out their faith. Far more than just an historical document, the Book of Acts is an inspired account of the triune God living and working in and through the lives of ordinary people and how the world was transformed as a result. It is a description of how many of the promises Jesus made in His earthly ministry were fulfilled in the lives of His followers, most notably the promise that they would be empowered by His Spirit to carry on His work in this world.

Because of this, the Book of Acts is a source of great encouragement to modern day Christ-followers, for it shows us what the Christian community looks like, what it is capable of doing in the power of the Holy Spirit, and how it impacts the culture in which it exists.

I read the book of Acts frequently (perhaps three or four times a year) because it renews my vision, refreshes my spirit, and invigorates my personal walk with the Lord. I heed the admonition of the great Welsh preacher, Martin Lloyd-Jones: "Live in the book of Acts, I tell you: it is a tonic, the greatest tonic I know in the realm of the Spirit" (*The Christian Warfare*, 274).

It is our prayer that this study will be a tonic to our church, and that the things we learn will bring refreshment, renewal, and perhaps even revival. It is our sincere hope that this study will change us—that as a result of interacting with *Acts* we will be more aligned with God's intentions for us and experience more of His life and power in our midst.

This morning we are going to look at the first eight verses of chapter 1. These verses are an introduction to the Book's theme, but they also reveal some information found nowhere else in Scripture that serves as a foundation for all that follows. Luke, the physician, the friend, and part-time traveling companion of Paul, is the author, and he writes in **verses 1-3**. *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

Luke is writing to Theophilus, presumably a friend who had a keen interest in Jesus. His name means "one who loves God", and he is mentioned as well in the introduction of Luke's Gospel, which is the "first book" referenced in vs. 1.

Luke tells Theophilus that Jesus continued to give instructions to the apostles—His disciples—after He rose from the dead until the time He ascended into heaven, a period that lasted forty days. Evidently Jesus appeared at intervals, performing miracles and instructing His disciples about the kingdom of God.

Notably, that instruction was given *through the Holy Spirit*, which reveals something about the relationship of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Spirit. Prior to His death and resurrection, Jesus repeatedly declared that He *never* spoke or acted independently of His Father or the Holy Spirit, but only said or did what He was told by them to say or do. That collaboration continued even after He rose from the dead, and presumably it continues even now. This does not mean that Jesus is incompetent or incapable of saying or doing things on His own, but simply that mutuality and interdependence characterize the relationship of the Godhead.

But notice what the Holy Spirit spoke through Jesus about. Verse 3, the kingdom of God. Sound familiar? It's the same subject that Jesus spoke about when He was on earth. Jesus preached extensively about the kingdom in His earthly ministry, and His disciples had heard all of those teachings. But apparently, He had more to say. Why?

You might remember when we studied the Book of Matthew, we identified the theme as "The Upside Down Kingdom." That's because the inauguration of that kingdom, the appearance of that kingdom, and the evolution of that kingdom were so utterly different than what the disciples or any other Jew had in mind.

Yet as careful as Jesus was to explain these things about the kingdom, the disciples never seemed to fully grasp these kingdom concepts. They knew He was Messiah; they knew He would be the Ruler of the kingdom, but they could not let go of their belief that this kingdom would be physical, political, and geographical—that Jesus would literally overthrow the Roman Empire and sit on a throne in Jerusalem, and that He would do it in their lifetime.

So, in spite of Jesus' efforts to correct their skewed notions, they kept wondering, "When is He going to make His move? I mean, these miracles He is performing are fantastic, these sermons He is preaching are wonderful, but let's get on with it! Jesus, get this kingdom up and running! Make Rome go away! End the occupation! Take charge! Take over!"

And when Jesus finally did make His move to overthrow their enemies, it absolutely blew them away, because it was the last thing they expected. Instead of being crowned *king*, He was condemned as a criminal. Instead of being applauded and celebrated, He was beaten and brutalized. Instead of ascending the political ranks and taking His place on a throne, He ascended a hill called Golgotha and was nailed to a cross. Instead of wearing royal robes and a princely crown, He was stripped naked and given a crown of thorns. Instead of cursing the Romans and instructing His followers to retaliate, He said "Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." Instead of living, He died.

The disciples saw Jesus brutally murdered on a cross, and they thought that was the end of Him and any hopes for the kingdom. But three days after His death and burial He appeared to them, not as a ghost, but in His *body*, convincing them that He had risen from the dead, convincing them that He had reversed the irreversible.

So, the conversations that Jesus was having with His followers about the kingdom after His death and resurrection must have brought a great deal of clarity and understanding. Their real enemies were not Rome or any other earthly power; their real enemies were sin, Satan, and death. And by His death and resurrection, Jesus had defeated those enemies and was now qualified to take His place on the throne of God's kingdom.

If I could be privy to any conversations that have ever taken place in the history of the world, I think I would have liked to have been in on these conversations about the kingdom. Just exactly what Jesus said about the kingdom, we cannot be sure. But we know that it had to be important, because these are the last words they heard from Jesus.

I want to pause for a moment and underscore the significance of this. If the kingdom of God was Jesus' priority and the focus of His teaching both prior to His death and resurrection and subsequent to His death and resurrection, should it not be ours as well? Jesus did not spend these precious forty days with His disciples writing a policy manual for the church or teaching them how to manage church growth. He spoke to them about the kingdom of God. That's what they needed to know about, because the kingdom is what God's plans and purposes are all about.

Incidentally, I believe one of the ways you can tell whether or not you are in sync with the mind and will of God is how prominent His kingdom is in your thinking, how passionately

you feel about His kingdom, and whether or not your endeavors are contributing to the advancement of His kingdom.

Look now at **verses 4-5**. *4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

In verse 4, Jesus commands the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift His Father had promised, and then He identifies the gift, in verse 5, as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is not the first time Jesus had informed them about this gift. During the Last Supper, as He was preparing His disciples for His impending departure, Jesus made several profound statements about the Holy Spirit. He said, *“It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (16:7).*

A little earlier in that conversation Jesus had referred to the Holy Spirit as a Helper who would actually reside in them (14:16-17), evidence that Jesus’ departure would, indeed, be advantageous to them. The twelve disciples lived *with* Jesus, but He did not live *in* them, which is precisely why the disciples were often weak, clumsy, inept, and irresponsible. But if the Holy Spirit was not only going to live with them but *in* them then they would be substantially different people with substantially different capabilities.

For example, Jesus said, *26 ...The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26).*

Jesus knew His disciples were going to need the ability to remember and interpret everything He Himself had said and done while He was with them. Not merely to keep His memory alive, but to continue His work in the world—the work of proclaiming His message and advancing His kingdom. It stands to reason, then, that something needed to be done about their substantial deficiencies and limitations, like their propensity to forget, distort, and misinterpret. It stands to reason that, with the stakes so high, Jesus was going to have to provide more insight about Him than they were capable of having by using their human faculties.

That provision is the Holy Spirit—the third member of the Trinity, who knows everything about Jesus that there is to know. And Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit would enable His disciples to know and understand the truth about Jesus. He would impart divine knowledge—knowledge that otherwise could not be obtained or comprehended. And this knowledge would be comprehensive. *“He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”*

What a wonderful gift! The gift of permanently preserving the pure, unadulterated truth about Jesus and His kingdom, including truth that came out of Jesus’ very mouth! But how would this happen?

Getting back to Acts. It would be imparted by what Jesus calls a *baptism* of the Spirit. The word *baptize* basically means “to dip” or “to immerse.” Most often in Scripture it is used with reference to a ceremonial act, like when John baptized people in the Jordan River. But the word was sometimes used metaphorically to describe an intense, overwhelming, profound experience. For example, Mark records an incident in which Jesus said to James and John, “Are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (10:38). In the context he was referring to His suffering.

That is the way Jesus uses this word in verse 5. He's talking about an intense, overwhelming, profound experience with the Holy Spirit. Luke records Jesus saying it with different words: "Stay in the city until you have been *clothed with power* from on high" (24:49). In verse 8 Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes the disciples would receive power. Furthermore, the way Luke describes the baptism of the Spirit in chapter 2 is with the words, "All of them were *filled* with the Spirit" (v.4). So, being baptized with the Holy Spirit describes being possessed by the Holy Spirit.

There are other references in the New Testament to baptism of the Spirit. Paul, for example, said in 1 Corinthians that we have all been baptized by one Spirit into one body (12:13), suggesting that all believers experience this baptism of the Spirit. That raises some questions like 'when does this baptism take place and what kind of experience is it?'

We will deal with these questions as we go along in our study. Suffice it to say that the New Testament says very little about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, if indeed it describes an intense, overwhelming, profound experience of the Holy Spirit's fullness, then we can be sure that it is a good thing. To want it, therefore, is a good thing.

But I get the sense from the disciples' response that this news about the baptism of the Spirit went right over their heads. Their heads were still spinning about the kingdom. **Verse 6.** *⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

Even after all Jesus had taught them about the kingdom, even after His extensive instruction recorded in Matthew 24 in which He stated plainly that there would be a prolonged, indeterminate period of time between the inauguration of the kingdom at Jesus' first coming to earth and the consummation of the kingdom when Jesus returns a second time, the disciples still expected that Jesus would immediately establish a physical, political kingdom.

How could they still not understand? I think it's because, at this point, they had not yet been baptized by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, could not fully comprehend what Jesus had been telling them about the kingdom. Their understanding was still limited (and skewed) by their own experience, by their own theology, and by their provincial worldview.

They were thinking about the *political* power that would come with the restoration of Israel's kingdom and the end of Roman occupation. Jesus had been talking about the spiritual power that would come with the baptism of the Holy Spirit that would enable them to accomplish an extraordinary task.

Look what Jesus says in **verses 7-8.** *⁷ ..."It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

Did you notice that Jesus does not directly answer the disciples' question? Not because He was trying to be evasive, but because He was trying to help them understand that they, themselves, had a role in the timing of the kingdom's consummation. The kingdom would slowly advance throughout the whole world, not through political, military maneuvers or machinations, but through the proclamation of the Gospel. And the disciples and followers of Jesus would have an enormous role in this advancement.

Which is why, in verse 8, Jesus reiterates His promise that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them; that is, when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. We will discover that this is not political power, but power to proclaim God's message, do God's will, and accomplish God's purposes. This is how the kingdom will advance.

In verse 8 we find as clear a statement of purpose as we have anywhere in Scripture about what Jesus wants His followers to do. *“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* These are Jesus’ final words just before He was taken up to heaven, and if this is what He wanted to leave them with, they must carry a lot of weight.

There is something important in verses 7-8 that, in my experience, is often misinterpreted. I have heard quite a few preachers and teachers use verse 8 to exhort Christians to get out and be a witness for Christ.

But this verse is *not* an exhortation. Jesus was not giving a command; He was making a statement. He was telling His followers that when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they *would* be His witnesses. The command in this passage is simply to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes, because when He comes things are going to be different. When He comes, they are not going to have to try to generate motivation or courage or enthusiasm to be His witnesses.

When the Holy Spirit comes, not only would they *want* to be His witnesses, not only would they be *capable* of being His witnesses, but they could not help but be His witnesses, because they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He would be their new operating system, and they would be aligned with His desires, His will, and His agenda. And His desires, His will, and His agenda is advancing the kingdom of Christ. His method of doing that is to empower and enable disciples of Jesus so that, just as Jesus spoke to them *through the Holy Spirit* in verse 2, so also, they would be speaking through the Holy Spirit to others in Judea and Samaria—even to the ends of the earth.

So just sit tight. Stay in Jerusalem; wait for the Spirit to arrive, and then watch the Holy Spirit do and say extraordinary things through you!

And that is exactly what happened. That is what the Book of Acts is all about.

So, as we embark on this study for the next several months, I hope that you will get to know and experience the Holy Spirit in a very personal and profound way, just as Jesus’ disciples did. And should that happen, watch out! Our families, our church, our community, and even our world will be greatly impacted—for good and for His glory.

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Main Idea: The Holy Spirit is Jesus' perfect provision for the extraordinary task of advancing His kingdom throughout the world.

Introduction to the Book of Acts (1)

Luke the author

Theophilus the recipient

The purpose

Jesus' post-resurrection ministry on earth (2-8)

His appearances over forty days (2-3)

His instruction to his disciples

Through the Holy Spirit (2)

Concerning the kingdom (3)

His command: Stay in Jerusalem (4a)

His promise: Baptism of the Spirit (4b-5)

Recalling earlier instruction (John 14-16)

Metaphorical meaning of *baptism*

The future of the Kingdom (6-8)

The disciples' provincial perception (6)

Jesus' worldwide plans and purposes (7-8)

The Father decides when the kingdom will be consummated

Spirit-led disciples will advance the kingdom