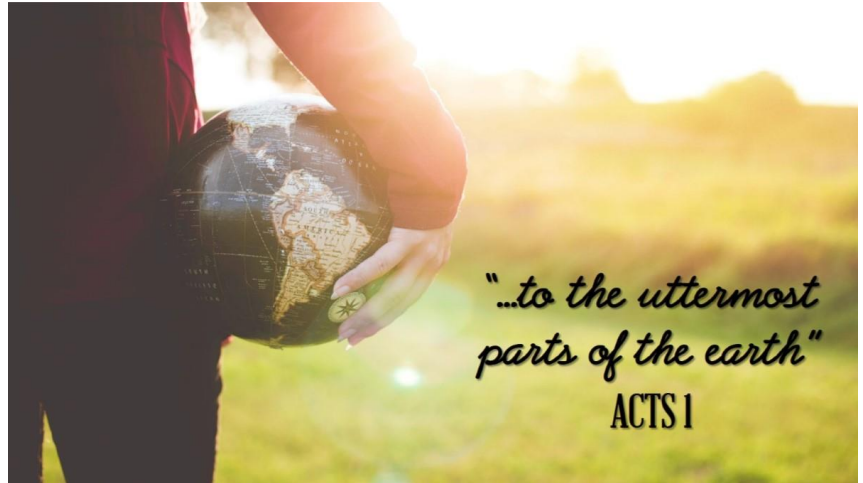


"To the uttermost parts of the earth"

- Acts 1, Part 1 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
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1 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."



"...to the uttermost
parts of the earth"
ACTS 1

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew we have the final words of Christ to His followers before He returned to His Father. Once again, paying special attention to such departing shots, we must not only hear His words but let them find root in our hearts. For these are our final "marching orders."

*Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him — but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, **"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** Matthew 28:16-20*

While it might be easy to see this event as the **end** of the story...the finality of Jesus' earthly ministry, we must realize that nothing could be further from the truth! This was not the **end** but in many ways only the beginning. For this was in essence the "passing of the baton." It was now **our** turn to step up to the plate.

The simple encompass of our faith is that being a Christian is to seek in all aspects to be like Jesus...to live and minister as Jesus did. It may not be *easy* but it is that *simple*. In a nutshell, this *is* Christianity and the denial of that aspect is the denial of Christianity. He had taught them with His words and His life, and now it was their turn to take the wheel and venture forth to manifest what they had acquired. To live on as He had lived. Further, to prove that they indeed *had acquired* such.

This question is critical, for even after all they had witnessed, heard, and experienced, we are told that some of them still doubted! We can tend to dismiss such a fact as being inexplicable, while simultaneously personally manifesting that same doubt. The trials would come, and they will come for us. The difficult days will arrive...to some degree, they already have, and there will be those who would not make the cut just as it played out in those days. I believe that while all of them no doubt thought themselves to be strong, *like Peter just a few pages before*, they had yet to be tested. Once under gun, the reality was that many of them would fold. The same is being manifested in our world as I speak. For most of us have never really been so validated, and have

in honest evaluation, lived a pretty easy faith, *especially in light of the greater Christian world*. We claimed "...even if I have to die with you (Lord), I will never deny you!" And yet when the winds of difficulty began to blow, we turned away from the love of Christ and our brethren for the comforts and temporal desires that the world offered.

The irony is not lost in the fact that some have spoke grandiose desires to be greatly used by God...as ministers, missionaries, and fulltime servants, but when honestly tested they were unable to let go...clinging white knuckled to family, vocation and financial priorities, self-entitlement, and temporal pleasures that the world offers. Thus missing the mark by the proverbial mile, we are now challenged to make changes in our priorities or join the untold masses of those who are Christians by name only, fated to hear those dreadful words at the end of our journey, "*depart from me, I never knew you.*"

This book is the "Acts." The "acts of the apostles"...the *acts of a greater church* that was committed, sold out, all in, and full of the Holy Spirit in power. Acts records a church in action, not the irrelevant church that we are so burdened with in today's society, not the "me" centered church, not the "First church of the Lazy," or the common "Our Lady of Gratuitous Comfort," which is so prevalent today. No, this was the real thing! A church with all of the human weaknesses of our modern church, but with a rare passion and an unheard of commitment even in the face of persecution, adversity, and sacrifice. A church that had honestly and manifestly died to this world, and, by doing so, truly lived like no other!

This was it. The reckoning day had come. The cry of "Put me in coach!" pouring forth from the lips and the hearts of those who had truly readied themselves for this day. These few men and women were going to be radically transformed: *equipped to meet the challenges they faced!* Their part was to come to the table as an empty vessel. Dead to themselves and dead to this world. Not just in word...that is easy to do and most of us have said as much, but they **truly** had left all of it behind. They had thrown their hat into the ring, embracing the promise that if they would "seek first the kingdom of God, *He would take care of everything else.*" They believed it, and they **proved** they believed it! They each would come to know a power and a commitment that would drive them to the very end; an end which history records was not a beachfront retirement community in Florida, but in fact a martyrs death.

Steven: was stoned death in the book of Acts

James: was beheaded

Matthias: was tied down and vultures ate him alive

Thaddeus: was crucified and shot with arrows until he died

Nathaniel: was skinned alive and then crucified while he was still alive

Philip: was hanged between the pillars in the temple until he died

Andrew: was crucified in Egypt

Matthew: was beheaded and possibly filleted alive

Mark: was dragged behind chariots until he died

Luke: was also crucified

James: was thrown from the roof of the temple

Thomas: was impaled in India

Simon: was sawn in pieces

Peter: watched as they crucified his wife and then he himself was crucified

Paul: was beheaded

Please note that all of these events were within the scope of the profound love that Jesus had for these men. John chapter 13 begins with "*Having loved his own (His followers)...., he now showed them the full extent of*

his love.” We seem to be unrelentingly entrenched in pressing Christ for a manifest of love that the world has defined and propagated. Unless we can let that go and embrace a greater love manifest and understanding, we are personally doomed to a life of misery, a failure of mission, and quite likely an eternity apart from Him. For He will never acquiesce. The world will never dictate the terms of a relationship with Him. In Matthew 10:37...in a chapter encompassing the “sending out” of His followers into mission, He spoke these words: *“Those who love their father or mother more than they love me are not worthy of me. And those who love their son or daughter more than they love me are not worthy of me. Those who will not accept the cross that is given to them when they follow me are not worthy of me. Those who try to keep the life they have will lose it. But those who give up their life for me will find true life.”* And unless such a premise becomes a reality and a practice in our lives, we are in truth living a charade. We are the jester. The fool. As Luke 11:20 foretells, we are left with the verdict *“Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; Then who will get everything you worked for?”*

What separated those apostles and the true disciples that have followed from the rest of us, was not and is not education or unique calling! They had two things going for them. Luke 24:48 says *“...you are witnesses of these things.”* They saw and experienced the glory of God manifested in their midst. They were in the camp of Moses who knew the *ways* of God while the masses knew only the *acts* of God. (Psalms 103:7) And secondly they would encounter a presence and bodily possession of the Spirit of God in what was about to happen in that “upper room” in Jerusalem.

What would take place from that point forward would change the world. We must acknowledge that the same is true with whatever an individual or local fellowship attempts to do for Christ today. Without the overt control of this Holy Spirit, both a church is dead, and the individual will fail!

Acts 1:1 - The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...”

The earthly writer of this book is Luke, whom Paul calls the beloved physician in Colossians and was Paul’s frequent traveling companion. It is understood that Luke was a Gentile, which brings a whole other perspective upon how we read what is before us. He writes to an apparent friend and brother by the name of Theophilus. By the language of the text concerning him, this Theophilus was likely a high Roman official. Theo was either greatly interested in this “Messiah” Jesus, or was in fact a new convert, and Luke was carrying on some long distance discipling.

We should note the order of the verbs that are laid out here in verse 1. It says Jesus began to do and to teach. That is important for us when it comes to our own desire to teach others; not that we will ever achieve a flawless perfection concerning the directives of the Word. It is crucial that we first do the Word of God before we ever step out to attempt to teach it. We can safely assume that Christ lived the gospel long before He ever took it to the streets. The greatest power is the message of the believer’s life!

It is a common albeit incredulous excuse to claim we can’t obey this or that aspect of scriptural directions because we have our own personal little ministry over here aside from the church. The hubris that is needed to claim we are outside of the written word of God so that we might “minister” in our own little box! How can we live out disobedience while telling others how to find the peace of God? It is clear to everyone except ourselves that such an individual is trying to have both the world as well as a purpose and standing with God. All I can do in such situations is pray for open eyes in such individuals because that kind of blindness is generally terminal.

It has been said that, “The man who is to thunder in the court of Pharaoh with an imperious, ‘thus saith the Lord!’ must first stand barefoot before the burning bush. Expressed simply and directly, God cannot use us as well when we are not fully submitted to His Word.”

(D.G. Barnhouse)

1:2-3 - 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, 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.

Notice the involvement of the Holy Spirit in even the ministry of Jesus Himself! How strange it is that we would so often think that we can operate without the Spirit! We often can spend so much time and effort seeking education, opportunity, the right words and the “magic pixie dust” to make life and ministry all come to fruition, when perhaps it would behoove us to spend more time in the embrace of the Spirit of God and modeling the results of that spirit filled life. Note the words “...*being seen by them.*” The resurrection and the very existence and life of Jesus Christ is not a matter of some bible stories we read, but rather the results of the Christ truth manifested in our lives for the world to see.

1:4-5 - 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; "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

We need to understand that this was not the first instance of the presence and involvement of the Holy Spirit. John 20:22 records a group encounter between the apostles and the Holy Spirit, and even the Old Testament records instances of the Spirit of God filling and empowering individuals for task. Yet for sure something new and fresh was occurring here that was foretold in John 7:39, as well as elsewhere in scripture; something that could and would only occur once Jesus was glorified upon the cross and resurrected in victory.

Jesus told these folks to wait. Such is reflective of our walk in Christ! Patience is so very mandatory in our faith! How often we are required to “wait upon the Lord.” There was a new baptism coming, one that would be an **immersion** into the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had, throughout the Old Testament, been reserved for a select few. It would now be poured out upon the believing masses with equal power manifested.

Jesus said at the beginning of this message “*I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.*” HE was given the authority, not us. So any power and authority we ever have is through His presence inside of us! Because HE has that authority, we have the ability to live Him out and go...go forth and not just make “converts” but make “disciples.” That requires an investment on our part. A lifetime investment. So get comfortable. If you are on mission, you are in for the long haul...

1:6-7 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

Prior to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, there was obviously still confusion and misguided direction. Certainly they were believers, and certainly they knew the presence of the Spirit of God. Call it what you want but there was about to become a melding of man with Spirit that would clarify, energize, and direct these lives as never before. At this point, we see yet a self-centered heart and mind. We see the earthly desire to not only **know all**, but in truth, **affect all**. Like all of us apart from the Spirit, they desired to be in control of their lives. To have some hand and be master of their domain. They wanted to know when He intended to set up His earthly

kingdom...when was it all going to be over? It is the same question and drive that manifests a thirst within man which exists fully today as well as in that day. It is that same drive that gathers the crowds at prophecy conferences, sells apocalyptic novels by the millions, and often moves us to scrutinize the pages of the book of Revelation. But what our Lord was more concerned about that day and no doubt *today* (for He “never changes”). His concern was whether the lives lived out in these men were to manifest holiness, commitment, and sanctification. He was fully aware of, and looking forward to that day. But until then, His focus was on this day before them! What would they do today? How would they live *today*?

1:8 - "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."

We need to clearly understand that the Holy Spirit isn't power. The Holy Spirit **brings that power** upon His in-filling. Power for what? Political clout? Earthly control and riches? Dominance over others? Control over the playing field of our lives? No, of course not. Such would violate all that we know that Jesus stands for. What then? The power we are promised is the power to manifest our faith in practice; to exercise the special gifting He has for each of us; to be witnesses of Him in word and deed to the ends of the earth.

There is an interesting verse which seems to shed a great deal of light on this issue. John 14:12 says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." I wonder, in light of such a teaching, what would things be like if we truly sought such a spiritual mirror to reflect upon? What would the church be like if everyone prayed as much as you pray? What kind of church would it be if everyone studied the Word as much as you study the Word? What if everyone evangelized as much as you? What if everyone served as much as you...was committed to the church as much as you? It is clearly evident that each of us are truly in need of such power.