

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

WITNESSES (ACTS 1:1-5)

LUKE GETS STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

In the first 3 verses we see the main thesis of Acts: **the command from God to be a witness, the role of the apostles, the importance of the Holy Spirit, and how Jesus' ascension was the launching pad for Christianity.** Luke also starts with Jesus as the Suffering Servant, before moving on to the resurrected Christ.

JESUS CAME BACK TO TEACH THE DISCIPLES

During the 40 days that separated the resurrection and Jesus ascending to heaven, He taught and prepared the disciples.

- Jesus **convinced them He was alive, comforted them about His resurrection and their future, and commissioned them to go out and preach the gospel to the world.**

HE ALSO GAVE THEM IMMEDIATE INSTRUCTION

If the disciples were to be successful, they had to wait for the "Father's promise," the Holy Spirit, to empower them. There is much division about what the "infilling of the Holy Spirit" means to the Believer. Throughout Acts we will see different reactions of people receiving the Spirit

THE MESSAGE IS COMING INTO FOCUS

Jesus died for us, and through His resurrection we can have His Holy Spirit. But, before we can live out the message of Christ, we must prepare and wait for His guidance and power.

- **The only way we can fulfill the commands of Christ is to be filled with the Spirit of Christ that energizes and equips us.**

THE ASCENSION (ACTS 1:6-11)

THE DISCIPLES NEEDED SOME REFOCUSING

Like many of us today, the disciples were overly concerned with earthly gov't. The Jews had been oppressed by the Romans for almost a century, and they were wondering when Jesus would liberate them. Jesus responds, "It is not for you to know the time that the Father has set by His authority."

WE STRUGGLE WITH THIS, DON'T WE?

We often say we trust God, but when the system isn't to our liking, or we don't have control, we tend to freak out and question God's intelligence.

- **One day God will set all things into proper order, but until then we won't know the time. We need to learn to trust God and His plan!**

YOU WILL BE THE CATALYST FOR CHANGE (V8)

We are not to become overly concerned about world systems because **God has called us to be the mechanism for positive change to the "ends of the earth."**

- The Holy Spirit is not designated to any select group, but is available for all people that call upon Christ. All Christians should be witnesses.

"HE WAS TAKEN UP AS THEY WERE WATCHING"

After Jesus gives the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), He ascends into heaven through a "cloud." Clouds are linked with God in the OT (Exodus 13, Psalm 68, Daniel 7).

- There were also "two men," angels, that announced that Christ would return in a similar way that He left.

ANTICIPATING THE LITERAL RETURN OF GOD (V11)

After the angels asked why the disciples were perplexed, they reminded them Jesus would return (John 14:2). When He returns, He will be just like He left, a literal, physical, resurrected Jesus. Jesus had to depart so the Holy Spirit could come and occupy the hearts of Believers.

WHY DID HE HAVE TO GO BACK TO HEAVEN?

The simple answer is it was His plan. Also, with Jesus in heaven we must turn our focus to God and live our lives on earth in faith knowing that if we are devoted to Him, He will return for us. **In the meantime, we have the infilling of the Holy Spirit that guides, encourages, and empowers us.**

ORDINARY PEOPLE (ACTS 1:12-14)

ABOUT A HALF MILE WALK

The disciples returned to their rented upper room where they had their last meal with Jesus before His crucifixion. The Upper Room, like many landmarks of the Bible, has become a very revered place. **Though it is cool to see iconic places, we must be careful not to create mystical idols of places or things.**

THERE WERE NO SUPERSTARS

Similar to making idols of places and things, we must also not idolize people. The men in v13 were not like the polished star "pastors" of today; they were **ordinary people that by the power of God lived extraordinary lives.**

- It is biblical to honor authority, but **we must make sure God ultimately receives the credit.**

HOW DID THEY BECOME EXTRAORDINARY?

It was the Holy Spirit that made them great men, but **the Holy Spirit only came to them because they chose a life of prayer and devotion to God.**

- They not only prayed, but they prayed together and often. Notice women were also a part of the prayer circles.

PRAYER AND PERSEVERANCE SET THE STAGE

Because the disciples were **obedient** to Jesus' instruction, **patient**, and **persistent in prayer**, God delivered on His promise to fill His people with His Spirit.

- Though they trusted Jesus, at this point **they had no idea how He was going to show up and dramatically change their lives and the world around them.**

HIS PLANS VS. OURS

Because we can have huge trust issues, we often fail to believe that God has greater plans for our lives than what we can create on our own. If we can pray and learn to trust God, He will shock us with His much better plan.

MOVING FORWARD (ACTS 1:15-26) FROM 500 TO 120

500 people were present for the ascension, but just 10 days later only 120 (24%) were present in the Upper Room praying and waiting on the Holy Spirit.

- We learn a disappointing fact about Christianity: **often times only a small percentage lead the charge for positive change in the world.**

PETER HAD STEPPED UP AS THE LEADER

After Peter's restoration (John 21), he starts to take charge of the group and suggested they replace Judas with another disciple because Psalms had prophesied that he would betray Christ and should be replaced.

- Luke shares the graphic story of Judas' death that would have been common knowledge in their region.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER OUR FAILURES

We often talk about the Church's success, and we should, but we would be foolish to not remind ourselves that sometimes we fail and people turn away from truth.

- **We're not to be crippled by our mistakes, but we're to learn and grow from them. God uses our mistakes for His glory if we repent.**

WE ALL HAVE TWO CHOICES AFTER A MISTAKE

The Judas route: we make a mistake, get bogged down with our guilt, shame, and depression and **make more foolish choices, some of them permanent.**

- **The Peter route:** we make a mistake, **humble ourselves and seek the Lord.** We make changes to avoid future mistakes. God then uses us for His kingdom.

WE MUST ALSO MOVE FORWARD

Instead of constantly dwelling on the fall of Judas, the 11 focus on making another disciple. They considered 2 great candidates, prayed about it, and "cast lots" to see who the Lord wanted and Matthias became the 12th.

- Similar to rolling dice, casting lots was a common Jewish way of making a difficult decision.

WAITING, WATCHING, AND PREPARING

- Because Jesus ascended back into heaven and sent His Holy Spirit, Christians can be effective conduits of the power and love of God in their communities and across the earth.
- We must be obedient, pray and be patient as we wait for the Lord to empower and guide us.
- We must watch for opportunities to share His love and truth with others.
- We must prepare ourselves for Jesus' return and educate, love, and hold accountable the community around us.

WE JUST CULTIVATE THE SOIL

- We are called to cultivate relationships, love people, pray for them, and do our best to teach them, but we cannot be the one that makes the seed grow. Many will not listen, but we keep moving forward by loving the world around us.