

The Spirit of Power
Acts 1:1-8

Romans 8:1-11

Romans 8:12-30

Responsive Psalm 116:1-9

Turn with me to Acts chapter 1 this morning as we are going to start digging into this 2nd book written by Luke. So let us just start off this morning by reading our passage, Acts 1:1-8. So last week we went through and looked at the history of this book, the evidences for the author, the time period it was likely written, and we talked a bit about the authors purpose of this book. This is something that is apparent in the opening of this book for the first few verses are actually a summary of the Gospel. IT would seem that one of the main functions of this book, is to show that the ministry of Jesus did not end with his death on the cross, but rather that was a launching point to something even greater. A better ministry, built on better covenants, and better promises, as us New Covenant people like to say.

So as we see and had mentioned last week, the opening of this book is deliberately tied back to the opening of Luke's Gospel account, both being written the same person. It would seem that this Theophilus to whom he was writing was in the need of some encouragement, or instruction or at least some clarification and assurance about the understanding of Christianity. For that is what this 2 part letter is, the gospel work in the book of Luke, and the gospels continued work throughout this book of Acts. As it says in verse 1 and 2, “of the former account I wrote to you, of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which he was taken up”

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is presented as one who is powerful in word and in deed before the people. Jesus is not just some religious pilgrim who chose a life of wandering, and teaching, and not having a place to call home. but rather he is the Messiah, the Chosen one of God, the Promised Seed of Abraham who had come to bring salvation to the world and reconcile God's people, the true Israel to himself. We see this very thing in the final chapter of the book of Luke, chapter 24, in the account of the 2 who were traveling to Emmaus who encountered a stranger..who was Jesus, but as Luke writes, Their eyes were restrained so that the did not know him. Then, as they traveled together he instructed them throughout all of scripture starting in Moses all the things which pertained to himself.

This is not just some wise teacher, some wandering prophet as some would believe, but he is very Son of God himself, who had the power to calm the storms, to blind these 2 disciples from recognizing him, and to to lay down his life and take it back up again. This is the one whom scripture told of, from the beginning. And his power did not end, nor did the his ministry, but rather it is carried out with power through the holy spirit in each and every one of God's followers.

Christ's ascension into heaven after his death, burial and resurrection is the climax of the Gospel narratives, but it is not the climax of the story, but rather the beginning of a new chapter. Again looking at verse 2, “He was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen.” The life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit all points to evidences of a Sovereign God. None of these things were by chance, none of these things were random acts, but they were orchestrated, designed, and carried out by God himself. Just as all of scripture is God's redemptive story, the record of events, of prophecies, or kings, and slaves who have all played a role in their time to bring about God's perfect plan is nothing short of mind boggling and amazing.

To many people spend too much time trying to rationalize and end up taking away pieces of God's sovereignty. In their attempt to understand, or defend the concept of man's free will, they end up creating a narrative of a God who is not totally, and fully in control. Yet, each and every step of the way, from creation to ascension, to the spreading of the gospel across the world, to even our own ministry it is all God working sovereignly to will and to do for his own good pleasure.

It says in verse 3, that after the resurrection he stayed with the apostles for 40 days, instructing them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Then in verse 6, they ask, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel.? Despite all that has happened, through all of the teaching that Jesus had done, both before and after the cross their focus was still upon the physical nation of Israel. They still did not understand, nor did they see the larger picture...but they were missing a piece to understanding, they were missing the Holy Spirit.

As he told his disciples, in John 16, "But these things I have spoken to you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go away to Him who sent me. Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. And when he has come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they do not believe in me, of righteousness, because I go to my father and you see me no more, of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Why can they not bear them now? It is for the same reason that they still believed that he had come to rescue Israel from Rome, and establish them once again as a mighty nation. He continues on and says, "However, when he, the spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will tell you things to come, he will glorify me, for he will take of what is mine and declare it to you."

Without the Holy Spirit they were not fully capable of understanding all that they were being told. In verse 8, he says, "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." This really helps to understand the disciples and their seeming inability to grasp everything that Jesus had been teaching them. As we worked our way through the book of Mark, the things that seemed obvious to us in his teaching were completely lost on the disciples, they seemed to barely ever grasp the lessons being taught. But in light of the fact that they had not yet received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it makes sense that they would have a hard time discerning and understanding not having the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit granting it to them.

And nothing has really changed, for the reality is one can not see the kingdom of God without first the ministry and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the case of the Apostles it was not as if the lack of the holy spirit made them unbelievers, for we see throughout the gospel accounts their belief that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and their faith and trust in his teaching even if at the time it was not granted to them to fully understand and grasp it. I am reminded of Hebrews 11, at the end of the chapter after he had just listed a bunch of people who have gone on before, and died in faith..yet without the spirit, the author there says, "All these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise."

They did not receive the helper, they did not receive the Holy Spirit as we who have come to Christ after Pentecost have. Yet, they were still faithful, yet they were still justified by that faith, they believed in the Messiah to come, as we look to the Messiah who has come. But look what the Author of Hebrews says about this in verse 40, of chapter 11. "They did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." Interesting huh? God has provided something better for us, he has given us his helper to minister, to guide, to help us to see the things of God. Indeed one can not see the things of God without the Holy Spirit, and one does not have the Holy Spirit without the new birth.

So, as you can see, there is a logical flow of events here, the new birth...the indwelling of the Holy Spirit...and the ability to see the kingdom of God. Many believe in a different order, there are many who believe that first they believed, and because of that belief they have been born again, and because they are born again they then have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But scripture tells us over and over again, that one can not see the kingdom of God, one can not believe, and indeed no one even seeks after God unless there first is the new birth, an act of God alone upon only those who God wills.

Again we see this sovereign work, of a sovereign Lord, who orchestrates all things for his own pleasure. Even the salvation of his people is subject to God's will, not mans. It is not man who decides to believe and follow God, but it is God who first enables through the new birth, it is God who just like Jesus did with the 2 strangers on the road to Emmaus, he opens our eyes so that we may see him.

This idea, that man is actually powerless in his own salvation is offensive to many. And on the opposite side are those who believe that since everything is already predestined and predetermined then we have no need to witness or share the gospel. But as we know, both of those ideas are wrong and go to far into either extreme. Just as he answered his Disciples after the resurrection, when they asked if now was the time of redemption for Israel, as we see in verse 7 he said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." So it is the same with salvation, it is not for us to know God's calling, it is not for us to know who and when someone will come to faith. But, it is for us to minister, to share, and to pray that God would open the eyes of those we minister to.

Our ministry is like that of the parable of the Sower. We are to spread the seed of the gospel, and of the good news of Christ, and it is God who has prepared that ground that it falls upon as to whether it will take root and live, or wither and die. It seems that there are 2 camps when it comes to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and I would argue that both are wrong. There is the charismatics who see this book of Acts, and the miracles, and great things performed by the apostles under the guidance and through the power of the Holy Spirit and they apply that to their ministry today. The focus then becomes on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a way that the only real proofs are miraculous signs.

Sure, they would still argue for faith, they would still argue for belief in God, but it would seem that largely a lot of that becomes back seat issues and it is the miraculous, outward, showy spiritualism that becomes the main focus. They become hyper focused upon the believed work of the spirit. I say believed because they are looking for signs which serve no redemptive purpose, and as scripture teaches us such things are false. What you end up with is the same issue that the Hebrews were dealing with, and the Galatians...and quite frankly probably every church, and believer at some time in their life. Elevating anything beyond Christ himself does nothing more then create a false sense of piety, and a false sense of holiness.

Such things work in man, to build upon man's pride, to make one feel better about oneself, to bolster our self esteem. It becomes an idle, it feeds into our pride, and instead of making us holier as it would seem to be is the intent, it actually creates in us sin. And anything that creates in us sin, anything that causes us to be arrogant, or prideful, or that would take our focus away from Christ, is in fact not of Christ, and therefore not of the Holy Spirit. This radical view of the spirit's work ends up being a tool of Satan used to lead people astray, and the cause spiritual blindness, and false assurance and hope. I believe that such false hopes, and false assurances borne out of a false ministry and gospel is more dangerous than one who outright denies God. For one is surrounded by the warm feeling of a hope that is empty, while the other must wrestle with the emptiness of a life without hope.

These individuals when they come face to face with the gospel, will rejoice in it, will sing praises to God, they will do good works in God's name,.....but sadly may very well be those who God says in Mathew 23, "depart from me, I never knew you." Then you have the other side, those who in practice discredit the work of the Holy Spirit. I say in practice, because in word they would not deny its power, but by practice they do. These are those who believe that salvation is by man's own decision. These are those who believe that they must appeal to man's free will in ministry, in an attempt to scare, or button hole someone into a confession. They see the Holy Spirits work as something synergistic with their own, not the fact that the Holy Spirit has already been working, and has prepared the ground. The danger of such comes full circle, and ends up falling into the same pitfalls as the charismatic view of the spirit. For in putting this focus upon man's own ability, it also puts the focus on your ability as the one who is the witness.

It is your words, it is the way you argue your points, it is what you have said, and what you have done that brought someone to Christ. Again, this does nothing more than to build up arrogance and pride within the heart of that individual, and another point I didn't even mention that happens with the charismatics as well as this other side of discrediting the Holy Spirit, is envy. For those who do not display the so called gifts of the spirit as others, such as speaking in tongues, or prophecies, or healing will be envious of those who do. And likely with those who rely on their own ability and appeal to mans will, people will become envious of those who seem to be more successful in their ministry than others. Again, what do we see in these 2 ends of the misunderstanding of the spirits work? In both cases we see an outcome of sin, and as said before...if the outcome is sin, then the work is not of the spirit.

And there is actually a 3rd way that the ministry of the spirit is discredited, but it is not in the world of salvation, but rather in the sanctification of the believer. It is the falling back upon law, after having been born again, having been changed by the spirit and have become a new creation in Christ, to go back to the law is to discredit the convicting work of the spirit in sanctification. That's what Roman's 8 :1-11 is all about. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Chrsit Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit." Those who have the indwelling of the spirit no longer have a need for an external, moral law to guide them as to how to live. You have the living spirit indwelling in you, Christ has written the law upon your heart, upon tablets of flesh not of stone. Do not discredit the ministry of the spirit by returning back to the law, by attempting to keep some sort of moral code, but instead live by the spirit, and in doing so you will put to death the deeds of the body and live, as Paul wrote in Romans.

We must be careful to not fall into either of these camps, the ministry of the spirit is mysterious, it operates outside our own understanding or ability to understand, but it should never show itself in a way to glorify or give credit to the person. The ministry of the spirit is a ministry of redemption, a ministry of conviction, and a ministry of hope. The spirit does not come upon us so that we may prophesy, or speak in tongues, or dance about...but those who are Christs are indwelled by the spirit who ministers, and without the spirit one can not see the kingdom of God. Desiring God's website has a 3 minute video of John Piper talking about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but not only the spirits ministry, but its absolute necessity, So I will close out this morning by quoting Piper in his sermon.

We know from John 3:5 that it is the holy spirit that causes us to be born again, “truly truly I say unto you, unless one is born of water, and of spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” We know from 1 Corinthians 12:3 “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” We know from Romans 8:13 we read this morning, “you must put to death the deeds of the body by the spirit, or perish”

We know from 2 Thessalonians 2:13 that all our efforts to pursue holiness will be hopeless unless sanctified by the spirit. We know from Ephesians 1:17 that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of wisdom, and without him, we will live lives of absolute foolishness, this is why the world is the way it is, for the world does not have the spirit. We know from 1 Corinthians 12:7 that each believer is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good. And we know from Romans 8:11 If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit which dwells in you.

“No Spirit? No new birth, No spirit? No confession of the Lordship of Jesus. No Spirit? No victory over sin. No Spirit? No progress in sanctification. No Spirit? No spiritual wisdom. No Spirit? No spiritual gifts, No Spirit? No Resurrection”

This ministry of the spirit in the life of the believer is essential, one can not believe without it, and one who believes is empowered by it. We must not discredit the spirits power to change lives, for it is only by the spirit that there is any hope of such. It is not our own ability to be persuasive, but it is the spirit who gives our words power. It is the spirit who convicts, do not harden your heart to him if you hear him, if you have doubts today of your own salvation, if you are not sure it may be because the spirit is not ministering in you in a way for you to have assurance of faith, but rather is causing those doubts so that you may truly turn, repent and believe, so that you may no longer be self deceived, It is better to wrestle with such doubts, to ask those questions, to test your faith, and live, then it is to suppress them in a sense of false assurances, leaning upon your own strength and understanding, and in pride hardening your heart. May our prayer this day, be for the spirit to move in our hearts, to give power to the word shared, to give conviction where needed, and to give hope and peace through whatever we may each be dealing with.