**You Will Receive Power to Be Jesus’ Witnesses**

April 19, 2020

Acts 1:1-14

Key Verse 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The gospel is the story of the finished work of Christ. Jesus said in his high priestly prayer in anticipation of the cross in John 17:4, “I have finished the work you gave me to do.” And then on the cross, in John 19:30, just before he gave up his life, he said, “Tetelestai,” which means, “It is finished.” Jesus indeed finished the work of redemption. There is nothing that you or I could do to add to that; it’s done. Salvation is a finished work. But do you know that Jesus has an unfinished work?

Look at verse 1. “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.” Notice the word, “began.” Jesus began the work of saving all men from their sins. He gave his life on the cross as a ransom sacrifice. But proclaiming the good news and teaching the gospel is not finished. The book of Acts tells the story in part; and the story is still being told today through God’s people. It will continue until Jesus comes again. We are in the process right now of finishing the work which Jesus began. Acts covers about 33 years of history of preaching the gospel. In such a short time, ordinary men and women turned the world upside down. Acts 17:6 says, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also ... saying that there is another king, Jesus.” (ESV) They brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole Roman world. Everywhere they went, they stirred up the society. For example, in Ephesus, after believing in Jesus, many people burned idols worth 5 million dollars, and idol-making businesses went bankrupt. How was it possible? The apostles were not well trained Bible scholars. They did not have money. But when the Holy Spirit came to them, and they obeyed the Holy Spirit’s leading, the great work of God was possible. Is it possible today in Canada to turn the world upside down?

Look at verse 3. “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This is the most significant event in human history. Jesus’ resurrection is God’s victory over the power of sin and death. Jesus’ resurrection marked a new beginning for mankind to live victoriously in this world. Jesus’ resurrection opened the door to the kingdom of God for all who believe in him. We now have a living hope in the kingdom of God. Men who suffered from fear and despair under the shadow of death and the power of sin could now have hope in the Risen Christ: as Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we. When he appeared to his apostles, the Risen Christ spoke about the kingdom of God. This was the content of his message from the beginning. In Mark 1:15 he said, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” The book of Acts ends with, “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” The kingdom of God is both the present spiritual reign of God and the future realm over which he will rule in power and glory.

Your effectiveness and my effectiveness in preaching the gospel is directly related to our understanding of the word of God, especially the message of his kingdom. When I was a young Christian, I was often frustrated that I could not answer a question about Christianity properly. I couldn’t remember many references, and I stumbled around. That is why Peter said in 1 Peter 3:15, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” We need to be able to defend the faith. For example, if someone asks, “How could a loving God allow so much suffering?” many Christians would have a hard time in answering that. We need to be able to give a clear answer for the living hope we have in Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus taught the kingdom of God even after his resurrection.

Look at verse 6. “Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’” When the apostles heard that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit, they immediately thought of the prophecy of Joel (3:1) that God would restore the kingdom of Israel. Jesus did not rebuke their thought completely. But he taught them that it is not for them to know the times or dates that the Father has set by his own authority. Down through the generations many people have tried to systematize their Bible knowledge and develop timetables and charts to foretell the Second Coming of Christ. Isaac Newton spent the second half of his life to calculate the date of Jesus’ coming from the Bible. In fact, he spent more time doing that than developing Calculus and Mechanics. They have all been wrong. Only God knows when Jesus will come again. We must respect God’s sovereign rule of his redemptive history. We work as if every day is our last, and we plan as if his coming is far off, and we leave the date to him. I don’t know when I’m going to die. I don’t want to know. I just want to work every day as if it is my last.

Then what should Jesus’ apostles do? Look at verse 8. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus says that his apostles will be his witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives his people the power to testify about Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit no one can testify about Jesus. A man may be highly talented, intensively trained, and widely experienced, but without spiritual power he is ineffective. On the other hand, a man may be uneducated, unattractive, and unrefined, yet with the power of the Holy Spirit, he can be a powerful witness. The fearful disciples needed power for witnessing, holy boldness for preaching the gospel. They would receive this power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” When the Holy Spirit comes on us, we will no longer remain powerless. When the Holy Spirit works in us, we are compelled to witness to Jesus with burning hearts.

Look at verse 8 again. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus revealed his plan of evangelism. The apostles must begin witnessing in Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified. There were hostile forces in Jerusalem. But there were also many people whose hearts were ready to accept the gospel. It is where God chose to start the work of the Holy Spirit. We should begin witnessing to Jesus where we are, especially with our family members. It may be easier to preach the gospel to strangers because they don’t know us. But our family members know us well, and we need to demonstrate our changed lives to make our message credible. But some think that the place where they are is not a good place to begin for many reasons. The real problem is that they do not have the Holy Spirit’s power to be Jesus’ witnesses. When the Holy Spirit works in us, any place can be a fruitful mission field.

The gospel would spread to Judea and Samaria. Here Judea symbolizes our friends, Samaria symbolizes those who we don’t like. Jews and Samaritans had experienced centuries of hostility toward each other based on cultural and racial prejudice. But the gospel of Jesus is universal. It applies to all men. All men are sinners and all men can be saved when they simply repent of their sins and accept Jesus’ saving grace by faith. The spread of the gospel to Judea and Samaria foreshadows the destruction of all human barriers and the coming of true peace in the world. Then the gospel would go out to the ends of the earth. This reveals God’s love for all people. God loves all people of the whole world. He is not willing that anyone perish, but wants everyone to be saved. For this, he sacrificed his one and only Son Jesus Christ on the cross as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. For this, he raised Jesus from the dead and made him the source of eternal salvation to all who believe in him. For this, he was sending his apostles out into the world to be his witnesses.

The word witness comes from martyres, plural. We get the English word martyr. What is the connection? The connection is that the word witness came to be the word martyr because so many witnesses to the gospel were killed. The word came to mean one who dies for his testimony because so many did. St. Paul said, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2Tim 3:12) In order to be a disciple of Jesus, you have to be willing to lose your own life. Christ is on trial. The Holy Spirit is the lawyer for the defense. The Spirit calls you into the court of the world to give a testimony. You need to decide what kind of witness you will be; good, bad, or indifferent. Consider the apostles’ message of the cross. They were going into the Roman world full of slaves, and they were saying that if you are going to enter the kingdom of God, it is necessary that you become a slave of Jesus. It was the worst possible invitation imaginable: “You need to become a slave, and the master is a crucified Jew from Israel.” This was a very hard sell; foolishness, stumbling block. How nice it would be if joining a church would make you rich and successful and everything goes well; you would be honored and respected. But persecution was happening everywhere so that witnesses essentially became martyrs. But they became effective witnesses in spite of horrible messages because they affirmed their message by their changed life.

If you are a Christian, you have received the Holy Spirit. If you have received the Holy Spirit, you are a witness. The only question is if you are a faithful one or an unfaithful one. The kingdom advances not through politics, not through some kind of cultural morality. The kingdom advances one soul at a time through personal testimony, personal witness. Our witnessing depends on our attitude. A London Times reporter was interviewing people who were helping to build the great cathedral in London. The architecture was Sir Christopher Wren, a very famous architect and the name of the cathedral is St. Paul’s. The reporter asked several workmen who were exactly doing the same things, “What are you doing?” The first man says, “I’m putting this rock in the slot. Isn’t it obvious?” The second man was asked the same question and said, “I’m earning a day’s living.” The third man was asked what he’s doing and said, “I’m helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul’s Cathedral.” Our attitude determines our calling. For some Christians it’s just kind of like sticking a rock in a slot; it’s just kind of filling time. For other Christians it’s just kind of, “I’m trying to earn my reward to get to heaven.” Do we have the calling that the Christian life is all about helping the Lord Jesus to finish the work that he began?

Look at verses 9-11. “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’” Jesus’ ascension gives us hope in his second coming in power and glory. This same Jesus who was a good shepherd for his people will come back as King and Judge to establish the Kingdom of God forever. Sometimes we want to be spectators watching for his return, like the disciples looking intently into the sky. But the angels urge us, “Don’t just stand there! Participate in world mission by being Jesus’ witnesses.” At the rebuke of the angels the disciples withdrew their gaze from the cloud and they returned to Jerusalem. Of course, they had a lingering fear of the Jews who killed Jesus on the cross. But they obeyed Jesus’ command, “Do not leave Jerusalem.” The power of the risen Jesus overwhelmed their hearts. They were beginning to change from fearful men into obedient men of God with world mission vision.

Look at verse 14. “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” These eleven men—who had distinct personalities, and who had struggled with one another for more power—joined together in prayer. This was possible when they met the risen Christ and received the same direction to obey the world mission command. When they saw each other in light of the world mission command, they realized that they were members of the same team, not rivals. They could be one in spirit with a common prayer topic. Right now, we are praying for UBF community which is affected by coronavirus pandemic. We pray that this pandemic may be over soon so that we may worship God together in person. We also pray that God may protect all of us, especially, those who work in hospitals.

Paul said in Acts 20:24, “I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.” We need to fulfill our part of the unfinished work of Christ in the time that God has given us until Jesus comes again.

Big Idea: God gave us the task of finishing the unfinished work of Christ.