

## 03a ACTS

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our study this evening to clear our minds and prepare our hearts, lay aside the distractions and the pressures and the issues that may be in the forefront of our thoughts and put them on the back burner for a period of time so that we can refresh our souls and be ministered to by God the Holy Spirit. Shall we pray? Father, it is a wonderful promise in your word that you sustain us with your strength. Our lives are ordered according to your plan.

We have a future that is based on your integrity and your kingdom and the work of your Son. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and the life that we have because of him. We thank you that he has not only rescued us in the past and not only sustains us in the present, but he is returning for us in the future and will enter us into an entirely new phase of existence where we can continue to learn and grow and hopefully be able to reflect your glory.

We pray that as we have this time allocated to us that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding in your word that we can store it away in our souls and have it available to be the basis for our thinking and to aid us in evaluating circumstances and situations so that we can think and live in a way that is pleasing in your sight. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, tonight we resume our study. We are right at the border between Acts chapter 1 and Acts chapter 2. There are some startling events that take place in Acts chapter 2. It says, When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And before we even go any further, we want to look at that verse.

What do you think about that? When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. Why is this true? Why are they in one accord and why are they in one place? The reason is found back in Acts chapter 1. And we need to revisit and explore a little further Acts chapter 1 verses 4 through 8. Jesus gathered his disciples together and he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem. This, of course, would be after their trek to Galilee.

We talked about that. It is recorded in the other Gospels. But they are to wait in Jerusalem for what the Father had promised.

And he says in verse 4 of chapter 1, You heard about this from me. I told you about this before. And we can find this in our scriptures.

You go to John chapter 14 beginning in verse 16 and about the next 10 verses or so. You can go to chapter 15 and verse 13 where Jesus talks about the Comforter who will come and lead them into all truth and so on. This is the promise of the Father and Jesus specifically told them about it.

Well, let me stop here before we review again verse 5 because there is a great parting of the ways, there is a great interpretive decision that is made when we come to this passage and when we look at this situation in the words of Jesus to his disciples. Now think about it. We are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We live in this first decade of the third millennium after Christ. And at some point or another we came to faith in Christ and entered into or inaugurated into God's plan and started heading in the direction of God's kingdom. So we go to the scriptures and we look for information, we look for guidance, we look for direction.

What is the purpose? I drive back and forth to work and we have several radio stations here in Dallas that have Christian programming. Late at night when I'm studying I flip past the Christian stations and hear people talking. And I don't know about you but it worries me that when I speak and am trying to teach the Word of God I am going to produce the same effect that is produced on me when I hear others who are speaking and preaching and talking about the Word of God.

In that it starts to sound like unintelligible syllables. It's just preaching, you have a hard time concentrating on it and when you do concentrate on it, it's an otherworldly thing. I was listening to someone on the radio, very well known, very well known here in Dallas, very well known at Dallas Seminary, very well known out in California, talking his heart out, preaching away on a passage and I kept asking myself, why am I not affected? Why is this not motivating me? Why is it not activating some energy in my soul to live a better life for Christ? In other words, and not to be picking on this particular individual, because I'm sure the same thing happens with me when I'm trying to teach the Word of God.

There's something that has to be taking place in the process of communicating the Word of God and receiving the Word of God that makes it matter, that makes it important enough to us that we carry it past the end of the lesson. I'm sure probably everyone listening to the sound of my voice has heard a Christian radio show or heard a radio preacher or a recording from a church and the words, especially those of us who grew up in church, sometimes the words just kind of flow over you and it's comforting and it's familiar and you can affirm what is being said, but you are no different at the end of that sermon. And two hours later, trying to reconstruct its main points and trying to figure out, well, how am I going to live differently because I heard that sermon or I heard that talk or I heard that lesson, it just doesn't seem to have substance.

It doesn't seem to have the kind of weight. I used to help my dad move pianos from time to time when I would be home on leave or back after I got out of the service or whatever. Once in a while, most of the time, I'm happy to say my brothers got that lucky job of picking up these 600-pound upright pianos and tipping them into the back of the pickup and so on.

But I remember distinctly one time I went with my dad to a retirement home and there was a piano that we had to move and we had to move it across this ballroom. Well, this particular piano, unlike most, had pretty good wheels underneath and so we didn't have to use a dolly. We were using the piano's wheels and we got it started.

And if you've ever moved a 600-pound object that's on wheels, at first it's like it doesn't want to move at all. And with two people pushing on one end, pretty soon it'll start to roll. And then once you get it going, it kind of takes on a life of its own.

And so we got this thing rolling and, of course, the wheels are not used very often on pianos and they don't tend to want to just... It's not like a shopping cart where you can easily steer it. It started veering off and heading for the silverware tray over on the left instead of the doorway. But now it's got its momentum and so you've got to get over to the side and it takes a lot of effort to push it and get it where it's going.

Well, I always think of 600-pound pianos when I think of momentum and direction because it's hard to get them started. And then once they're started, you want to be sure it's going in the right direction because it takes a lot of effort to change it. And we have a momentum in our life.

We have a pattern of living, don't we? We have a routine. We have tasks that generally, for extended periods of time, are the same. We get up in the morning, we do certain things.

My question is this. Here we are in this book, the Acts of the Apostles. What are we supposed to get out of these 11 men that Jesus appears to and He says, stay in Jerusalem until you receive power from on high, until you receive the promise of the Father, and then you're going to be witnesses.

To answer that question, we look at the traditional response, which is what the church has taught and what the church believes. And I would venture to say that 80 to 85, perhaps 90% of all the churches in our metroplex and perhaps the entire Bible Belt, if you go to the Constitution and it says, what is the purpose of our church? Why do we meet? What does it say in the doctrinal statement? What does it say in the church constitution? What is the purpose for the church? Wife, W-I-F-E, is an acronym that's used a lot to sum up a church. W-I-F-E, worship, instruction, fellowship, and evangelism.

But just like 1 Corinthians 13, the greatest of these is evangelism. We are the evangelical church. And when you listen to sermons, there is this odd mixture of, well, please consider supporting our radio ministry because we want to continue to preach the gospel, but the lesson I just heard wasn't preaching the gospel.

It was something out of Galatians or something out of Ephesians. It was talking about lifestyle and values and how we should think. This is how you should think.

This is how you should live. This is how it should be in your life. This one I was listening to that got me on this train of thought was in light of Father's Day coming up.

So it was about the Father and how the Father should be. He had a poem about, if I can do the best I can, then I'll be very glad, but the thing that I really want to do is be a super dad or some such thing. That wasn't it, but it all rhymed with dad and glad and I would give away everything I had.

I want to be a good dad for my son and all that. Well, that's fine, but then at the end they said, well, to keep this gospel ministry on the air and continue to preach, well, there wasn't any gospel in it, but it's intermingled. We say one thing and do another.

We say we're here to evangelize the lost, but we really need to learn how to live. And so then we go to the Scriptures and try to find out what it is. But I think part of that confusion results in us not really gaining any momentum in a particular direction.

I think in a lot of Christian circles and Christian talk and Christian preaching and teaching, we don't really catch fire and move toward an identifiable, concrete goal. When we woke up this morning, what is this day? This is Friday. When we woke up this morning and crawled out of bed and went through our ablutions and got ready to tackle the day, did we have a clearly defined spiritual goal in mind? And was it the right one? A lot of people say, yes, I have a clearly defined spiritual goal.

I've got to be a witness for Christ, and I've got to be constantly alert for somebody to lead to the Lord. And when someone has a clearly defined goal, that is usually it. That's what we tend to get in our denominational churches, our evangelical, conservative denominations and Bible churches and so on.

I would like to suggest to you that in Acts chapter 1, we have the answer to this dilemma. And it goes to the way we interpret Scripture. When we go to the Old Testament and we see God talking to Moses and talking to Israel and saying, I'm going to lead you out of bondage, I'm going to take you out of Egypt and bring you to the Promised Land, we don't say, well, I'm in Egypt, and I want to go across the Jordan to the Promised Land.

We understand that it is an illustration and a shadow and a metaphor, if you will, for our life. We are delivered from bondage to sin and our nature and the world and the devil, the flesh, all of that. And so we don't take that literally.

When God speaks to Moses and when God communicates to Israel in the law, we go through our steps of observation, interpretation and application. They always drew that as an upside-down V in my hermeneutics classes. You have observation over on the left and then you move up to interpretation.

That's the high ground there. And then you come back down to earth on the right side of

the upside-down V with application, observation. What does the text say? What actually happened in days gone by? Interpretation, what does it mean? What is the timeless spiritual truth that is illustrated there, that is communicated there? And then bringing it down on the right side there, what does that mean to me? I am not an Israelite.

I'm not trying to slay the Hittites. I am here in the year 2003 trying to live a life that pleases the Lord. So what should I do with this information? Well, that is kind of a lengthy and seemingly rambling introduction to what we're looking at in Acts 1-4-8.

We are going back because what has the church done with Acts 1-4-8? We have not done observation, interpretation, application. We have done observation, application. We say we are the disciples.

We, therefore, are to be witnesses to Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. In the same way that Israel represents the people of God and they received a commission, they had a place that they came from and they had a place they were going to, you and I and the rest of believers on this earth and this generation have been taken from somewhere and we are supposed to go to somewhere. We saw this in our fundamental study a few weeks back on the idea of the man that was let down through the ceiling by his friends.

And Jesus said, seeing their faith, Son, your sins are forgiven you. Then he has a little discussion with the Pharisees and says, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth that forgives sins, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go to your house. And what did we draw from that study? It's another one of those metaphors.

It pictures salvation. Jesus says, I see your faith. And because of that, your sins are forgiven.

That is the condition for forgiveness of sin, i.e., salvation, is faith expressed in the right object for faith, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that you're saved, your sins are forgiven, and you've entered into a new life, Jesus doesn't say, well, be warmed, be fed, go your way, your sins are forgiven. I really like the color of the blanket you've got on that stretcher.

And then he goes on. Something is supposed to happen. There is a mission.

There is a goal. There is a set of instructions given after that transformation, after entering into this new status. And Jesus gives him three things.

He says, stand up, pick up, and walk. You have to stand. And so we went and we looked at passages that talk about standing, standing against the wiles of the devil, standing firm in the faith, standing in the face of adversity.

If any man thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. And then we looked at the walking,

walk in the light, walk by means of the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, walk in love, all of the walking passages in the New Testament. Because we're not saved because that's God's goal, His goal is to try to keep us from going to the lake of fire, and then we're pretty well done.

It is the means to an end. It's just the beginning of a process. Same thing here.

Jesus has been training his disciples, and they are now entering a new kind of existence. They're going to cross the line into a new dispensation. And in a way, it is a picture, because this is not the point of their salvation, is it? They've been believers since back in the days of John the Baptist, before they ever saw the Lord Jesus.

They may have been believers since their youth. But they're entering into a new phase. And a lot of us as believers sort of tootled along in church, or we were Christians, but we didn't really catch fire and catch on and start pressing for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus until a later point.

But now, hopefully, we are. We've recognized that there is an urgency, that there is a mission, that we have something we need to do. And time is ticking by.

We need to do it now. We need to be redeeming the time. The days are evil.

Every minute that ticks by is one step closer to the Lord Jesus returning, and we won't get this chance again. And it's not waiting for God to strike us on the head and send us to Zambia to be a missionary. It's buying up the time now.

So we want to know what is this mission that we're supposed to do. Well, people go to the Word of God and say, Well, I've gotten that far. I've recognized I'm supposed to be doing something.

And they come to Matthew 28 and 19, and they come to Acts chapter 1, and they say, Oh, I'm supposed to do what Jesus told the disciples to do. Go make disciples of all nations. Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature if you want to accept the longer ending of Mark.

Or be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. And we say, Oh, well, my observation, interpretation, application, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, that means going out in concentric rings farther and farther away from home. Well, let's step back.

This is a specific group of people with a specific commission for a specific purpose. But because they have that purpose and they have that commission does not necessarily mean that all of us do. We need to go through the observation, interpretation, and then application.

So let's try that. Let's take a look at Acts chapter 1, verses 4 through 8. Jesus gathered

them together. Jesus is always dealing with His disciples as a group, isn't He? Unless it's time for discipline.

He took Peter aside and rebuked him privately. But for instruction, He generally deals with them in groups. Sometimes He takes His advanced students, Peter, James, and John, and puts them on the Mount of Transfiguration or puts them in the upper room.

But seldom, if ever, do you see Jesus dealing one-on-one with a disciple for training and for instruction, saying, Well, you know, Peter, you're really far along. Let me take you aside and give you some insight into the way the kingdom works. He tells all of His disciples.

There is a fellowship. He gathers them together. This is why we forsake not the gathering of ourselves together, the assembling of ourselves together, for worship and for fellowship and for instruction, encouraging one another while it is called today, encouraging one another to love and good works.

Jesus gathered them together. Now, here's a timeless truth, right? You don't have to be a disciple to be gathered. But it is important.

And you can go to Ephesians 4 and see that we're all parts of the body and we contribute to edification of the whole group. What's the second thing? He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem. Now, do we throw this out because we're not in Jerusalem? What does it mean? They are where Jesus told them to be.

There's about to be a big change. There has been a big change. Jesus has left.

There's been a lot of turbulence, a lot of metamorphosis and transformation going on, a lot of strange events. Jesus says, don't decide that you've got to go flying off somewhere. Stay put.

What does this mean to us? How would we interpret and apply this? A lot of times when we begin to awaken, God the Holy Spirit finally gets through the hard rocks in our soil and the seed of the Word begins to grow and sprout and we start becoming motivated and sensitive to spiritual things and we really want to try to grow and please the Lord in a meaningful, active way. Then we start looking around and we're tempted to say, well, I've got to make some changes here. My spouse doesn't have the same level of fire that I've got, so maybe I need to leave them by the wayside or my family is not with me.

Maybe I need to rebuke them or try to get them all to come along with me or maybe I need to make some kind of big change. Some people have decided, well, I like the way this guy teaches that I hear on tape. I'm going to move myself across the country and attend his church.

Jesus tells the disciples, look, stand fast. The only two places he sent them after he was

crucified was their home of Galilee and Jerusalem, which is going to be the center of where things start. They're supposed to be there for Pentecost anyway.

They're supposed to be there for the annual feast that the Jews observe. That's right where they would have been anyway. He says, don't make an unusual geographic move just because there are new things happening and you're going to come to a new understanding and God the Holy Spirit is going to start revealing things to you.

Don't think that this means you've got to start changing a bunch of things. He says, just stay in Jerusalem. And he emphasizes this.

Stay in Jerusalem until you are able to benefit from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He will tell you if and when you need to leave. But don't just immediately conclude.

And we saw that Peter finds a way to initiate some action before the Holy Spirit gets there. He says, okay, I'll stay in Jerusalem, but I'm going to elect another apostle, right? We need to just stand fast. Let the dust settle.

Let God's Holy Spirit do His work and we will know of a certainty. There will be no question. There will be no doubt.

So the first principle is don't forsake the assembling. Seek out, cultivate, fellowship with believers, especially believers who seem to have some maturity and can benefit you with wise counsel or with prayer and comfort and that sort of thing. And secondly, don't make any drastic changes just because you come to a new spiritual understanding or you really start making progress in your spiritual life and you start to elevate your perspective a little bit, begin to see further toward the horizon and it's a new experience and it's exciting.

And sometimes we're tempted to think, I need to make a bunch of changes now. Resist that temptation. In effect, quote, unquote, remain in Jerusalem.

Just sit tight and let God the Holy Spirit help us digest and understand and make good application. There's no need to go off half-baked. What's the third thing? Wait for what the Father has promised.

They don't have to do anything in their own strength. They don't have to build anything. They don't have to take any trips.

They don't have to gather anything. They don't have to print up any flyers. They don't have to produce any study booklets.

They don't have to do anything other than just wait. And sometimes waiting is one of the hardest things we have to do, isn't it? To just rest. Let God initiate.

One of the principles of authority in any authority environment, whether it is a marriage

or a family or a nation or a military context or a business, is that those who have the authority do the initiating. If you are under authority and you initiate, you begin to undermine and work against authority. The authority is the initiator.

Those under authority respond and contribute and try to be a beneficial part of the solution rather than a part of the problem. So that's the third principle. Wait for what the Father has promised.

Now, in this case, specifically, it's the promise of the new ministry of the Holy Spirit. We already have an indwelling and sealing and filling and gifting ministry of the Spirit that's ongoing with us. What is it that the Father has promised us? He has promised us peace.

He has promised us patience. He has promised us the fruit of having that Spirit, hasn't He? He has promised us stability. He has promised us provision.

He has promised us guidance. He has promised us the ability to overcome our nature and to stand against the wiles of the devil and to not be deceived. Many, many promises that we have because of the presence of the Spirit.

Wait for the promise of the Father. And Jesus says, I have told you what those promises are. In this case, He told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be coming, the Comforter.

We have many, many promises. Concentrate on the promises. Wait for those promises to be fulfilled.

Let God initiate. He is the one that has the authority. That's what Jesus tells the disciples.

He says, it's not for you to know the kairos and the kranos. Even today in modern Greek, by the way, kranos is the word for year. It has the idea of long seasons of time.

And kairos is the word that's used for weather. They use kairos for weather. That's kind of a passing thing, something that happens in the moment.

And so you have short episodes and you have long duration type of eras in life. Jesus says, it hasn't been given to you to know the ins and outs of all of that. But the Father has fixed those by His authority.

He has the authority. Let Him pick the time and the place for witnessing, for confrontation, for separation. It will be clear if we will just wait.

If we'll stay in Jerusalem, wait for the promise of the Father. We don't have to agonize and make some kind of decision that doesn't seem to be prompted. God will lead us.

God will guide us. God will give us peace and patience and long-suffering. And what we do, we will do with confidence.

In the hour that we need the words, He will give them. What's the next thing? John baptized with water. You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

And this is a signal. Verse 5 is a signal of the change of dispensation. We saw this in the Gospel of Mark.

We saw it in the early portion of Luke. John the Baptist symbolizes the age of the law. He symbolizes the law of Moses.

He was the last Old Testament prophet. He sums up the law. That's why Jesus was baptized by John.

Because Jesus said, If we have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. And so when He says, John baptized with water, but you are going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, He's saying the dispensation is about to change. The law, which was a shadow and a foretaste of good things to come, is being replaced by the real thing.

The fulfillment of the types. Not many days from now. So be sensitive to the place in God's plan where you are.

Look at the big picture. Look at the divine perspective. Where are we? We are in the closing days of the age of the church.

And it's important to know where we are in history, where we are in our nation, where we stand in terms of recognizing that our society and our civilization may be on a decline and in a degenerative state. Canada has just legalized homosexual marriages. And they've already had some within hours, why men were getting married to each other up there.

It's only a matter of time until it's legalized here, because our society is degenerating. We no longer understand marriage. We no longer understand sexual relations.

It's looked at as recreation. Chuck Colson has a great article on that this week on his breakpoint. But they had come together in verse 6, and they were asking him, is it time for the restoration of the kingdom? Well, this is like when you get in the car, you're going to grandma's, and it's a five-hour drive, and after you've been on the road about 20 minutes, the kids start saying, are we there yet? Are we at the destination? There is a process.

And we tend to want to look ahead. We want the resolution. We want the consummation.

We want the fulfillment. We want the denouement. We want the problem resolved.

We want the situation fixed right away. Patience. Waiting.

Letting God pick the time and the place and the means is what we have to learn. That's

one of the reasons God leaves us here. He says God fixes these things by His own authority.

You will receive power. And this is a different word. Authority, *exousia*, is what you have at the end of verse 7. And this is the word *dunamis*.

It's a word from which we get dynamite, dynamics, and so on. This is ability. You will receive ability when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And these 11 men will be witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, until the end of the world. It is not unto or to the remotest part. It is until the end of the world.

By the way, what's the last thing Jesus said before He ascended? Did you ever memorize that verse? Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. Who was He talking to? These same 11 men. I will be with you throughout this commission to be witnesses both in Jerusalem and in the land, Judea, Samaria, until the end of the world.

In the same way, God has equipped us. God has given us His Spirit. God has given us ability.

We're going to take our break, and when we come back, we're going to look at the verses that document these truths. But if you catch the big picture here, think of Jesus' dealings with the disciples in the same way we look at the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures. We are not the disciples.

We do have a commission. We do have a gifting and a ministry of the Spirit that enables us for whatever we have been assigned to do. And in the same way that He equipped them, in the same way that He was with them, in the same way that they were to wait and let God pick the time and the place for their function, it's the same for us.

God gifts us. God assigns us a role and a ministry. It may just be within our family.

It may be child training. It may be the care and maintenance of our spouse. It may be the care of our parents.

It may be a ministry through our workplace, through our employment, or through the company that we're a part of. It may be in fellowship. It may be in social life.

Whatever area it's in, let God pick the time and pick the place and give us the ability through His Spirit. But do not be pushed into the rut that all of us are primarily evangelists. As I've said many times, it would be just as silly as telling a Marine Corps NCO, you are primarily a recruiter.

It is a happy function. It's a wonderful thing to do. But it has taken over and replaced the necessary understanding that each of us has that minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, we have a ministry that goes far beyond evangelism, that goes far beyond

having a witness or a testimony or discipling someone.

We need discipling. We need the testimony of Christ in our own lives. We need the transformation and the renewal that comes from understanding who we are and why we're here and what the transforming power is.

And we can wake up in the morning and say, I know what the purpose is for this day. It is to do what I do heartily as unto the Lord, to grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior, to develop a heart of wisdom and to prepare for the millennial kingdom and the eternal future in these unique training circumstances in which God has left us. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we're going to see some fascinating passages that document how God has equipped us just as Jesus is equipping these 11 men. That's what we'll look at when we come back.