

The Great Commission, Part 2
 Acts 1:6-11
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Stacy and I have always lived several hours from our family. Even when we lived in Pittsburg, Texas, we were seven hours from my family in Mississippi. Long road trips have always been part of our family life. It never failed that at about halfway to where we were going, the question would begin to be, “Are we there yet?” I mean, what parent or sponsor on a trip or anyone who has driven anywhere with small kids or with teenagers has not had that question? This question is simply designed to annoy the driver and turn him or her into a massive sinner.

I wonder if Jesus had the same experience when his disciples (soon to be Apostles) asked him a similar question in v. 6:

Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

He had been asked that before and, as a matter of fact, it was an unspoken expectation during His whole ministry. I don’t think Jesus was like me. I don’t think it bothered Him, but, let’s face it, Jesus had heard that question before, and now He heard it again, so it had to kind of sound like, “Lord, are we there yet? How much longer? How much farther?”

It is hard to know what the disciples were thinking when they asked this question. Perhaps they were confused about what would happen next. We know there were things they didn’t understand.

We know they didn’t understand that Jesus would rise from the dead. They thought when He died that it was all over. Then an amazing thing happened—Jesus rose from the dead. They had to have thought, “Wow! This is it! We have seen Him do amazing miracles. He raised the dead, cast out demons, fed thousands with little more than a sack lunch, and, on the Mount of Transfiguration, He was transfigured into brilliant light. Now He has risen from the dead. There is nothing to stop Him.”

Yet, after Jesus rose from the dead, He did what He had been doing before—teaching them. As a matter of fact, up to this point, Jesus had been teaching them for the last forty days. They may have been wondering when things were going to get kicked off.

In v. 7, He responds to their question. Look at His reply in v. 7:

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”

Jesus didn’t answer their question. Jesus reminded them as He had on other occasions that this information was not for them to know.

However, there is something they should know. Look in v. 8. In v. 8, He told them WHAT they would do until that day arrived.

Verse 8 is one of the most important verses in the book of Acts. In many ways, the whole book of Acts is an unfolding of v. 8. Verse 8 is the Great Commission, Part 2. It is our marching orders as the church because, in it, Jesus tells us what we are to do until He returns to restore the kingdom.

We will spend the rest of our time in vv. 8-11. I have four points to help us walk through these verses: Power, Purpose, Plan, and Promise.

I. Power (Acts 1:4-5, 8a)

I want to backup to vv. 4-5 and pick up the context of v. 8. Look at what it says:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now . . .

^{8a}But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."

What did Jesus mean when He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you?" This is the question I want us to consider.

Quite simply, Jesus was preparing His disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They needed the power of the Holy Spirit to become gospel witnesses. It was the power of the Holy Spirit that transformed thickheaded disciples into world-changing apostles.

But before we jump into WHAT the power of the Holy Spirit means, let's consider briefly the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit to God's people. Because if we are not careful, we will take for granted the incredible gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit being given to ALL of God's people.

When we look back in the Old Testament, we see that being given the gift of the Holy Spirit was not a new concept. In the Old Testament, people had been filled with the Holy Spirit. Usually, the gift of the Holy Spirit had been reserved for kings and prophets. Occasionally regular folk were filled with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it was a temporary filling, and sometimes it was a lifetime gift. John the Baptist was one who was filled with the Holy Spirit from the beginning and remained filled until his death. The point is that the filling of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was a rare gift and almost always temporary.

However, hundreds of years earlier, in Joel 2:28-29, it was prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all of God's people:

*"And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
²⁹ Even on the male and female servants
in those days, I will pour out my Spirit.*

There are other Old Testament prophecies that point to the giving of the Holy Spirit to all of God's children, but this one by the prophet Joel is one of the clearest. It is no small thing that the Spirit of God will be poured out on all of God's people. It is a radical departure from to whom the Holy Spirit was given in the Old Testament. The gift of the Spirit was a gift that was reserved for only select people in the past but NOW He will indwell all of God's people. This is a seismic shift in the work of God in the lives of His people.

By giving His people the Holy Spirit, God was filling them with His presence and power. He does not fill us with His unlimited power. The sharing of His presence and power through the Holy Spirit is what we theologians call a communicable attribute. A communicable attribute is where God shares some of who He is with us. God, by giving us His Holy Spirit, equips us to do the work to which He has called us. This is what we will see throughout the book of Acts.

Now, what did Jesus mean by the word—power. The Greek word for power in v. 8 is *dynamis*. This Greek word gives birth to English words like dynamite, dynamic, and dynamo. Both words are words used to describe power.

In v. 8, it refers to God’s people being filled with a person of the Holy Spirit and His powerful ability to complete the task He gives us. However, it is not a one-time filling of the Spirit as so often was in the Old Testament, but the dynamo of the Holy Spirit is an eternal gift for God’s children.

So, here is the thing. There is no doubt that Christians take the gift of the Holy Spirit for granted. We really need to slow down here, press pause, and think about the amazing gift of the Spirit of God to all of God’s people in the New Covenant.

Through the person and work of Christ on the cross in the New Covenant, Jesus purchased the gift of the Spirit for all of His people. Being given the Holy Spirit is an extravagant and costly gift.

Now ALL people who repent of their sin and trust in the work of Christ on the cross to pay for their sin and believe He has been raised from the dead receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God indwells them, and He never leaves them.

You will notice when you read Acts that the apostles were amazed that they had received the Holy Spirit. Then when they learned that the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit, they were overjoyed. Finally, when the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit when they were born again, their minds were blown, and they praised God for this incredible work.

So, let me come back to my original question: what does it mean to be given the power of the Holy Spirit? It means the Spirit of God indwells us with the power to do the work God has called us to do. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples and transformed them into apostles that were bold preachers, overflowing with passion for God, wise leaders, fearless missionaries, and unflappable sufferers.

The Spirit of God fills us with His power. It is the power that we need in order to do what He has called us to do. That is what we need.

He didn’t fill us with a business model. He didn’t fill us with a program. He didn’t fill us with an organization. He didn’t fill us with a strategy. He fills His people with Himself, with His power. He fills us with the Holy Spirit in order to complete the task to which He has called us.

Listen, I am not saying it is bad to have a model, be organized, have programs, or have a plan. I am saying if that is all you have and no Holy Spirit, you have no power. We must be filled with the Spirit. We must be filled with His power in order to do what He has called us to do. This leads us to our second point.

II. Purpose (Acts 1:8b)

For what purpose has God filled us with His Holy Spirit? Look in v. 8b:

You will be my witnesses.

What did it mean to be a witness? First of all, to be a witness is to be one who knows the truth and then tells the truth. Jesus’ disciples were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and they became apostles who were powerful witnesses to the truth of the gospel.

They were witnesses to what they had seen. They were witnesses to the good news of salvation that comes through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were witnesses that Jesus was the One whom the Old Testament promised would come to deliver His people. They were witnesses to the fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of all of God’s Old Testament promises. They were witnesses who told others about His miraculous virgin birth. They were witnesses to the fact that He was the promised One who sits on the

throne of King David. They were witnesses of His sinless, righteous life. They were witnesses of Jesus' powerful miracles whereby He healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. They were witnesses to the fact that the Jews killed Jesus by nailing Him to a cross. They were witnesses that Jesus' death on the cross paid for the sins of His people for all time and eternity. They were witnesses to the fact that Jesus was buried, but then on the third day, God raised Him from the dead, thus proving Him to be the King that God promised to send to deliver His people from an eternity in Hell. They were witnesses that God now calls all people to repent of their sin of breaking God's laws, the main one being not loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. They were witnesses to the fact that God, by grace through faith, saves those who trust in Jesus. They were witnesses to the fact that in Christ, people find abundant life and eternal life.

So, what is the purpose of being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit—it is to be witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is our purpose as well. Our purpose and the Apostles' purpose are the same—to be witnesses.

God fills us with His Holy Spirit in order to accomplish this task. ALL Christians have been filled with the Holy Spirit in order to be a witness.

It is true that God gives His people a variety of spiritual gifts. However, there is one gift of the Spirit that He gives to all of us, and that is to be witnesses.

It does not matter where you are a witness as long as you are a witness. Think about it this way. Think about moms who work at home and homeschool their children. They are doing the bulk of the parenting during the day. How are these moms a witness? They are a witness because they are witnessing to the next generation of children who come to faith in Jesus. Your children are your mission field. For some, the campus is where you are a witness whether you are in junior high, high school, or college. Your peers become your mission field. For some of us, we are a witness where we work. You may be a volunteer, an employee, a supervisor, or the owner. You may be retired now, and you have to rethink how to be a witness where God has placed you. It does not matter who you are or what you do or don't do—you are a witness for Christ in how you live, how you lead, how you speak, and how you serve others.

As a Christian, God has gifted you with the power of His Holy Spirit to accomplish the task to which He has called you and to the place, He has called you. This leads us to our third point—plan.

III. Plan (Acts 1:8c)

Jesus has given us the power of the Holy Spirit and called us to be a witness. Now in v. 8c, He tells us the plan for His witnesses. Look in again v. 8:

*“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the end of the earth.”*

The last part of v. 8 is the blueprint for taking the good news of the gospel to the world: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth.

Jesus' plan for His witnesses works out like concentric circles. The disciples were to stay in Jerusalem until they had been given the power to be witnesses, and after that happened, they were to begin being witnesses right where they lived and move out from there. If you look at the map of that day, Judea was the region surrounding Jerusalem. Then outside of that region was Samaria, where their hated half-breed relatives lived. They were to go there with the gospel. Then beyond that, they were to go to the ends of the earth.

While Jesus' plan is described in geographical language, His mission is not limited to geography. The New Testament teaches us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. The New Testament eventually says

God will save His people from every tribe and tongue. Just because the gospel has reached the shore of a continent does not mean the mission is accomplished. The gospel must penetrate cultures and languages. People must hear a gospel witness.

There we have it. This is the mission plan for us as witnesses. There is salvation in no other name but Jesus Christ, and that message must go to the ends of the earth.

When we read and study Acts, this is what we see played out in the book. It began in Jerusalem, moved to Judea, then to Samaria, and the book of Acts concludes with Paul preaching from a Roman prison in Italy.

Acts 1:8 is the Great Commission Part 2. In Acts 1:8, Jesus unpacks more of what He has called us to do as Christians. Jesus' commission of His disciples is not only for His disciples who stood on the mount with Him. It is for all of us. Their commission is our commission.

The Holy Spirit takes ordinary people and fills them with His power to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations. All of us are called to be witnesses right where we are, but some of us will be called to go to the ends of the earth with the message of the gospel. You may be called to go to hard places in very difficult circumstances, but the Holy Spirit will equip you with His power to be His witness in that place. Not all of us will go. Some of us will stay, and we will support those who go. We will pray, encourage and send financial support to them where they serve.

So, here is the deal. Jesus' plan to reach the ends of the earth is not yet complete. That is the reason we are still here. And as long as we are here, we must be about the purpose of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and that is to be witnesses right where He has placed us or where He sends us. We must listen to the Spirit to see if He is calling us to go to other places. He may call us to move to plant a church in our state or our nation. He may call us to leave and take the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. You may be sitting there right now and, like the disciples, trying to figure out what God wants you to do or if He wants you to go to the nations with the gospel. I would love to talk to you to help you discern that call. I can remember sitting in a church service and asking myself that question.

The point is that we have been filled with the Holy Spirit in order to be witnesses and until Jesus returns, this is our Great Commission. This leads us to our final point in vv. 9-11.

IV. Promise (Acts 1:9-11)

Right after Jesus gave them the Great Commission Part 2, He ascended into Heaven. What I want you to see in vv. 9-11 is that the message from the two men who stood by the disciples left them with a promise:

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

So, after Jesus had ascended, two men stood by them and asked them a rhetorical question, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?" I am sure the disciples were stunned because they had just witnessed Jesus being elevated into the air and then ascend out of sight into heaven. In addition to being stunned, perhaps they were confused and even sad that He left. Perhaps they felt overwhelmed at the task He had just given them. After all, these men had only traveled as far as Samaria and around Judea with Jesus, and now they have been told to go to the ends of the earth. Going to the ends of the earth probably blew their minds. Most likely, it was probably all of those things together.

So, these two men in white robes asked them a question to get their attention and remind them of one very important truth—Jesus is reigning as King, and He will return. He may have left, but He has not abandoned them as Jesus said in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 says:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

While the task may be overwhelming for us, Jesus is on the throne. He is reigning, and He has promised to be with us while we carry out this task. He has promised He will return, and when He returns, He will restore all things. We need to know that from the beginning of “*our Jerusalem*” to the ends of the earth, Jesus has not abandoned us.

There is no power shortage with the gospel. Jesus is not asleep on His throne. While there may be difficulties on this earth for us, Jesus is not overwhelmed. He is not sitting on His throne, scratching His head, trying to figure out what to do. When we are confused and overwhelmed, we can rest in the promise that He will never leave us or forsake us and that He is coming back. This is our promise.

Brothers and sisters, Luke’s message to Theophilus is for us. Jesus has given us power through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to carry out the mission of being His witnesses. He has filled us with His Holy Spirit. Jesus is still at work in and through us to take the gospel to the nations. And Jesus will come again in the same way He left. He will return bodily, riding on the clouds of heaven, surrounded by His holy angels. When He returns, He will judge the world in righteousness, and then He will set up His eternal, glorious kingdom.

This is the message we need to take to the world. This is why the church has been established by Jesus. People do not need to be told about some program that will make their lives better. That is not their greatest need. Their greatest need is to know God through the life, death, and resurrection of His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Their greatest need is to have their sins forgiven by Jesus Himself.

We don’t have a money problem in the world; we have a moral problem. We are all sinners, and we need a Savior to redeem us. Jesus has come and died for sinners, in their place, and for their sin. Then He rose from the dead to defeat death and hell. Money won’t solve this problem. Management won’t solve this problem. People don’t need to be improved; they need to be born again.

So, brothers and sisters: “We are not there yet.” And let me say, life will get difficult when we are witnesses. So, we must remember this promise—Jesus will return the same way He left. He will come on the clouds for all to see. Then when He returns, there will be a final judgment. We will see His kingdom stretched as far as the eye can see from east to west and north to south. At that point, our faith will become sight with our eyes, and we will see our King reigning and restoring all things.¹ This is a massive promise to remember. It is good news for us as we take the good news to others!!

¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Acts Chapters 1-8*, 21-22.