

THE WORLD MISSION COMMAND

Acts 1:1-26

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.”

Acts is the second book of St. Luke, the evangelist and historian. In his gospel, Luke recorded mainly who Jesus was and what he did. Acts was written as a sequel to the gospel story, to tell how Jesus' work was carried out, in and through his witnesses, and how the Christian church was born and how it spread. It spread first to Jerusalem (1:1-8:1a), next to all Judea and Samaria (8:1b-9:31), and finally, to the ends of the earth (9:32-28:31). Though the book is called "The Acts of the Apostles," it does not give us an exhaustive account of the acts of all the apostles; apart from Paul, only three apostles are mentioned. The book of Acts regards two or three persons who remained as witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection to the end as main characters in the work and history of God.

Chapters 1 and 2 mainly speak of how the Christian church was born. Today's passage, chapter 1, speaks of what the main purpose of the Christian church is. In this chapter we learn the true concept of the Christian church.

I. You will be my witnesses (1-8)

Look at verses 1-2. "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen." "My former book" refers to Luke's Gospel. The recipient of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles is Theophilus. In Luke 1:3, Luke calls him "most excellent Theophilus." We are not sure who Theophilus was. However, we can deduce that Acts was written to defend Christianity and to persuade a government official not to persecute Christians. As we know well, to be a Christian in those days was very dangerous. So Luke may have been addressing all Christians as "Theophilus," which in Greek meant, "lover of God."

During the forty days after his resurrection, Jesus gave his

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disciples many convincing proofs that he had been raised from the dead and was alive. We see that not only is Jesus alive, but also his influence is still alive in the world. In history, most people who studied the Bible realized that Jesus was truly the Son of God, and they were converted to Christianity; they stood amazed and fascinated. They entered a new world and lived a glorious life in Jesus.

Look at verse 3b. "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." During these forty days after his resurrection, time-wise Jesus was greatly limited. He must have had many things to say. But he spoke to his disciples mainly about the kingdom of God. Jesus began his gospel ministry with the words, "The kingdom of God is near" (Mk 1:15). After his resurrection, he mainly spoke about the kingdom of God also. Here we learn that the Christian church is founded on the kingdom of God. We must speak about the kingdom of God when we share the gospel of Jesus, even though people are only interested in the world.

Look at verses 4-5. "On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" The Risen Christ urged his people to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The people of Jesus' time did not know what to do with their sin problem. John's baptism with water did not change them. They needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Most people live by their willpower or smart minds. But soon they experience that they cannot control their emotional feelings and sinful nature with their willpower or smart minds. Whether they will admit it or not, they must admit that they are not ruled by their willpower but by the spirit in them. Those who are controlled by evil spirits can not do what they really want to do; they do only what they really don't want to do. Evil spirits make man say all the time, "I didn't mean it!" On the other hand, those who are ruled by the Holy Spirit are freed from the grip of sinful desires and can long for the holiness of God and experience the unutterable joy of heaven. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, and so on (Gal 5:22). We really want peace and joy, living in this troubled world. Therefore, the first thing we must seek is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God; at the same time he is the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

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When we have faith in the Risen Christ, we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus' teaching? Look at verse 6. "So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'" Their question revealed their hidden problem. The disciples were still Judaistic. In history, the Jews had had their day of independence, but subsequently they had become subject to many nations. So they began to look forward to the earthly messianic kingdom they thought God would establish through his promised Messiah, breaking directly into human history. This was the Judaistic concept of the kingdom of God in general. The disciples were still bound by this Judaistic utopian dream and they did not have the slightest idea about the kingdom of God.

Jesus knew that their concept of "the kingdom of Israel" was earthly. But he did not rub this out. Rather, Jesus turned their concept into "the kingdom of God." At the same time, he commanded them to be his witnesses. 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." This is the world mission command of the Risen Christ. Here we learn several things.

First, the world mission command restores man's mission. After God made the world and man, he blessed man and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Ge 1:28). God made man to be fruitful and to be the ruler of the world. This means that man cannot be happy by satisfying his petty desires, because man is made in the image of God, to be a kind of ruler. Man must have God's vision. Man must have God's mission.

Second, the world mission command inspires us with the secret of success. His world mission command sounds unrealistic. At that time, the disciples had to establish their future security. If they were to obey his world mission command, they would have to sacrifice their future security. But without sacrifice and venture, nothing happens. For instance, after World War II, Japan was literally desolate. In the

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midst of misfortune, many Japanese women, mostly from noble families, gave up their education and engaged in world diplomacy. Many of them sacrificed their marriage and youth for the sake of their country. As a result, many of them could gain the favor of diplomats at the U.N. Assembly. Following this, they seized the opportunity to extend Japan Airlines routes to every corner of the world to pioneer international markets. In the course of time, they restored their nation and became rich. On the other hand, the United Kingdom adopted a welfare policy for her nation. For the time being, the English enjoyed their wealth in a welfare society. But after 20 years, their nation was reduced to a third class nation economically. The secret of success is sacrifice and venture with a worldwide vision.

Third, the faith of the Risen Christ. At that time, the disciples were weary and tired. They were fearful of everything after the crucifixion of Jesus. In spite of themselves, the Risen Jesus gave them the world mission command to evangelize the whole world. To them, it was an impossible task. But the Risen Christ had faith in them, that they would be witnesses of his death and resurrection to the whole world. They were only a handful of very ordinary Galilean fishermen. At that time, they were nobodies in the world. But the Risen Jesus believed that they would be his witnesses--beginning in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and finally, to the ends of the earth. The Risen Jesus saw them as commanding officers who would conquer the whole world. Faith is everything; it is all or nothing.

Fourth, the world mission command reveals God's broken shepherd heart for the perishing world. God had decided to accomplish world salvation work. At that time, the world was in the darkest darkness. Men treated women like slaves. When the Savior of the world came and healed the sick and preached the good news of the kingdom of God, evil men arrested him and nailed him to a cross. But the Risen Jesus wanted to spread the good news of the kingdom of God to the whole world through his witnesses, in order to save all men from their sins and bring them back to his kingdom. The world mission command is the best expression of God's broken shepherd heart.

When the Risen Christ gave his disciples the world mission command, he wanted them to be his witnesses. A witness is a person who saw a certain thing and says nothing but the truth about it. When the Risen

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Christ told his disciples, "You will be my witnesses," he hoped that they would be witnesses of his death and resurrection before the eyes of the people of the world. At that time it was not easy for anyone to be a witness of Jesus, for it was an act of martyrdom. This is the reason the word "witness" has in it the meaning of "martyrdom." At that time, it seemed that the world mission command would not work. But it worked mightily. The Apostle John looked too lovely to be his witness. But he became a witness of Jesus who was slain for the sin of the world. Revelation 1:9 says, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

How could they be his witnesses? It was possible for them when they received the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "another Counselor." The King James Version puts this as "another Comforter." The Holy Spirit is the one who fills men with courage and strength; evil spirits make men utterly powerless. When the disciples received the Holy Spirit, they could be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Here we learn that the Christian church is a fellowship of witnesses to the power of Jesus' death and resurrection.

II. The glorious ascension of the Risen Christ (9-11)

The Risen Christ gave his disciples the world mission command. Then what did he do? He ascended into heaven. Look at verse 9. "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

How did the disciples react to his ascension? They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going (10). They became absent-minded. Then, two angels of God came and rebuked them, saying in verse 11, "Men of Galilee, 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."

It was necessary for the Risen Christ to ascend into heaven so that his disciples might be independent workers led by the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:12; 15:26,27). It was necessary to prove that Jesus had returned to his glorious kingdom. Jesus is the only person in

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history who knew where he came from and where he was going. Jesus came from the Father in heaven, and he was going back to the Father in heaven (Jn 16:28). Jesus came from the Father in heaven in order to show us the way to the Father in heaven (Jn 14:6). After showing us the way to the Father in heaven, he returned to the Father in heaven.

The ascension of the Risen Christ was necessary because it gives us the hope of the second coming of Jesus. These days, many historians say that history is going nowhere. They think that history is a haphazard conglomeration of chance events which are going nowhere. But this is not true. According to the Bible, the whole creation is moving toward the consummation of history--the second coming of Jesus. As he promised, Jesus will indeed come in his Father's glory with his holy angels as the Judge, King of kings and Lord of lords. When we have faith in the second coming of Jesus, we can be his witnesses. When we have faith in the second coming of Jesus through his death and resurrection, we can truly be holy pilgrims on earth.

III. The joined together in prayer (12-26)

After the ascension, they returned to Jerusalem and stayed in an upstairs room. "Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James" (13b). They were the future commanding officers of the world salvation work. There were several women there who were supporters in the spiritual warfare. What did they do at the beginning? They all joined together constantly in prayer. To them, prayer was the most potent weapon. In the past, the disciples were too selfish to get together. Peter and Matthew were there all the time around Jesus. But they could never be friends. But after the ascension of Jesus, they got together under the command of Jesus. Thus they made a spiritual vessel which God could use in his spiritual warfare for world salvation work. In this way, the church of Christ was formed, and the church of Christ was characterized to be a fellowship of prayer under his world mission command.

But there was a serious problem for them. It was the problem of Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus. Because of his betrayal and suicide, they were deeply wounded. They needed healing from Judas' betrayal. So Peter stood up among the believers and explained that

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Judas' betrayal was to fulfill the Scripture (16,17). In verse 18 Peter spoke of the fate of the betrayer. "He fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out." In verses 20-22 Peter urged them to choose one to replace Judas in his place of apostleship, to be one of the witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. In this way, they restored their spiritual vessel.

In today's passage we learn that the world mission command of Jesus is the best expression of God's broken shepherd heart. God wants to save all people of the world from their sins, with no one missing. We also learn that the Christian church is a fellowship of the witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus. May God help us to be his witnesses.