

2018 New Year's Message

YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER TO BE MY WITNESSES

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.”

What is the book of Acts about? It is a history of the early church. In spite of inward and outward challenges, the church grew beautifully and expanded triumphantly. The story of Acts continued for the past two millennia, and it will continue until King Jesus comes again.

Today the world is changing faster than at any other time in human history. Soon there will be cell phones you can carry like a bracelet, eyeglasses with a LCD screen, robot gadgets that do what you order, and flying cars in which the only thing you need to do is to enter a destination and push a button. With the advances in technology, a rapidly secularizing culture today casts a gloomy picture of the future world. Adoniram Judson, one of the earliest American missionaries to Burma, faced many hardships, especially little fruit in ministry over decades due to the country's strong Buddhist culture. But he said, “The future is as bright as the promises of God.” As we start a new year, let's think about a bright prospect based on our Lord Jesus' promise, **“You will receive power and you will be my witnesses.”** May the Holy Spirit fill us with new strength and vision to serve the people of our time. May the Holy Spirit also inspire young people to live in this time with a sure hope.

I. The Living Hope of the Kingdom of God (1-3)

Verses 1-3 is a summary of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. The former book, the Gospel of Luke, begins with the Christmas account, God's coming into the world as a humble baby Jesus. It ends with Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus' resurrection was the unique miracle in human history in that a human body rose from death for eternal life. Therefore, Jesus presented himself to

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the apostles to give many convincing proofs that he was physically alive. The Risen Jesus is the King who has conquered death and received all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). His resurrection declares that he is the Son of God (Ro 1:4). It proves that God accepted his death as a perfect atoning sacrifice for our sins. His resurrection also gives us a living hope of our glorious resurrection. During the 40 days after his resurrection, the Risen Christ gave instructions to the apostles. His instructions are recorded in Luke 24:44-49. He opened their minds to understand two most important prophecies in the Scriptures: First, his death and his resurrection as Christ were the core of God's world redemption plan. Second, God would save peoples of all nations through the preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his Name.

Verse 3b says that the Risen Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the restoration of God's reign. Jesus' first message was, "**The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near**" (Mk 1:15). Jesus bound up the brokenhearted, set the oppressed free, and healed the sick. He proclaimed good news of God's grace, and he welcomed sinners and outcasts as God's family members. New life and joy came to individuals and communities through his ministry.

Today, increasingly more people think that there is no universal truth or moral absolutes. This leads people to live by their intuition and emotions. In this culture, many people fall into the power of darkness like meaninglessness, loneliness, addictions, depression, and so on. This year, we experienced two tragic mass shootings at Las Vegas and in Texas. It is reported that over 300 mass shootings occurred in our country in 2017. This tells us how people who are captured by the power of darkness are increasing. Only Christ, the Savior King, can free people from the power of darkness. We should earnestly pray for God's kingdom to come to our country and people.

The kingdom of God is also the restored paradise to come. Humans cannot live without hope. Science and technology cannot be our hope. Many of us have hope for a good job, marriage, a sweet home, success, and retirement. Can these be our real hope? 1 Peter 1:24 says, "**All people are like grass, and all their glory is**

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like the flowers of the field..." Everything that is temporal cannot be our real hope. Apostle Peter said, **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you"** (1Pe 1:3-4). Eternal life in the restored kingdom of God, where God is the light, is our ultimate living hope (Rev 22:5). Jesus' resurrection and the living hope of the kingdom of God are the good news the apostles were to proclaim. All peoples of the world today need to hear this good news.

II. The Promise of the Holy Spirit (4-8a)

On one occasion, Risen Jesus 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."** (4-5) Apparently, the apostles had decided to leave Jerusalem. Jesus understood their fear of the Jewish authorities and their sense of failure to stand with him during his suffering. Nevertheless, Jesus commanded them to stay in Jerusalem, waiting for another most wonderful gift from the Father after the Son--the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit came to God's servants who were chosen for specific purposes. By his blood shed on the cross, Jesus opened the New Testament era that was foretold to come (Jer 31:31-34). Jesus opened a new and living way for us to approach God (Heb 10:20). Jesus also sent the Holy Spirit from the Father to come to us unlimitedly. The Holy Spirit would come to dwell in God's people forever (Jn 14:16). Jesus called the Holy Spirit another Advocate or Counselor like himself (Jn 14:16). The Holy Spirit would remind believers of Jesus' words and guide them into all the truth (Jn 14:26, 16:13). The Holy Spirit would glorify the Son by testifying about him (Jn 15:26). Jesus said, **"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"** (Mt 28:20). Our Lord Jesus has been with his church. Even now, the Lord Jesus is with us through the Holy Spirit (Ga 2:20). Amen!

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Then the apostles asked Jesus, **“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”** (6) The Jews had long waited for a Messianic kingdom that would bring them freedom and prosperity. It was prophesied that the Messianic age would begin with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29). So, when Jesus spoke about the baptism with the Holy Spirit, the apostles were thrilled. But Jesus said to them, **“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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.”** (7-8) Jesus didn't deny the restoration of Israel. God's promises concerning Israel would be fulfilled according to God's timetable. Then Jesus told them what was the most important and urgent thing for them and his church, with an emphasis, **“But you will receive power...”** It was to receive power from the Holy Spirit and to be Jesus' witnesses.

How does the Holy Spirit empower us and manifest his power? Most of all, he pours out God's love into our hearts (Ro 5:5). In God's love, we can be more than conquerors in all things (Ro 8:37). The Holy Spirit gives us victory over evil spirits and sin (Eph 6:12, Ga 5:16). When an evil spirit attacks us with lust or jealousy or pride, we should not remain silent, but cry out to the Holy Spirit for help. The Holy Spirit delivers us from temptations. The Holy Spirit sanctifies our hearts and minds by the word of God. By keeping our purity in the Spirit, we can drive out evil spirits in people through prayer. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit gives us wisdom, boldness, and courage to witness to Christ (Ac 4:31, 5:41-42, 28:31). Here, to witness means to speak up about Jesus and the gospel truth. When we witness to others about Jesus, the Holy Spirit himself testifies to Jesus with us (Jn 15:26-27). The most amazing thing is to see how the Holy Spirit breaks the hearts of people to repent and become completely new persons.

I'd like to share a story that shows how the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of people who look impossible to change. One late night, Mr. D. L. Moody saw a stranger leaning on a lamp-post on a Chicago street. He approached the man and asked, “Sir, are you a Christian?” The man yelled at him, “It's none of your business, whether I am a Christian or not.” Mr. Moody said, “Yes, it is my business.” Then the man retorted, “If you were not a sort of preacher, I would

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knock you into the gutter!” Weeks passed by. One night, as Mr. Moody was in bed, he heard a tremendous pounding at his front door. He thought the house was on fire. When he opened the door, there stood the man. He said, “Mr. Moody, I have not had a good night’s sleep since that night you spoke to me under the lamp-post, and I have come for you to tell me what I have to do.” That night, the man accepted Christ.

When the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, the Jewish religious leaders and even prison could not stop them from preaching the gospel boldly. Persecution could not hinder the joy and beautiful fellowship of the early Christians. The church continued to grow and expand. The Roman world was in a culture no better, if not worse, than that of the world today. But, through the witnesses who were filled with the Holy Spirit, people were changed and the kingdom of God advanced in all the cities where the gospel was preached. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, great spiritual revival will come to the communities and campuses we serve.

Apostle Paul said, **“Be filled with the Spirit”** (Eph 5:18). In this age of the Holy Spirit, there is no more important and exciting thing for us than to receive power by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these....And I will do whatever you ask in my name.”** (Jn 14:12-13) The Lord Jesus wants us to do great things for God by the power of the Holy Spirit. He promised to do great works through our prayers. Though we may fail in other things, we should not fail to pray for being filled with the Holy Spirit. As we pray for it by faith in God’s promise and will, we will certainly receive it.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not emotional or mystical experiences as some people think. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Ac 16:7). When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are filled with Jesus Christ. We are filled with Jesus’ heart and Jesus’ love. When King Jesus rules our minds and hearts, we are full of love, joy, and peace. We are filled with Jesus’ passion and Jesus’ vision. What would believers be enabled to do when they receive power from the Holy Spirit?

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III. You Will Be My Witnesses (8b-14)

Let's read 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.”** In the first part of this verse, Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit. In the latter part, Jesus' words, **“and you will be my witnesses,”** are also stated as a promise. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would enable the apostles and the church to be his witnesses by God's power. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke recorded how the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus himself led the apostles and his church, strengthened them, and worked through them. After the coming of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2, the Holy Spirit appears as the agent on 46 occasions, Jesus himself on 6 occasions, and an angel of the Lord on 3 occasions. God's power was manifested through church leaders' powerful witness to Jesus (Ac 2:4, 4:33, 6:10, 13:9,18:5, 28:31), spread of the word of God (Ac 6:7, 12:24, 19:20), growth of the church in number (Ac 6:7, 16:5), healing the sick and casting out evil spirits (Ac 5:16, 9:34, 16:18), and so on.

Wow! We want to experience these powerful works of God in our lives and in our church. Can we? Yes! When we carefully observe the great works of God in Acts, we find out that they were the outcome of the powerful witness to Jesus. What should we witness about Jesus? In Acts, the apostles' most frequent witness was **“Jesus is Christ and Lord.”** They testified to his death, resurrection, and ascension. They preached repentance, forgiveness, and salvation through faith in his Name. They witnessed that Jesus will come again as Judge of the living and the dead (Ac 10:42, 17:31, 24:25). We should also witness all these things about Jesus.

In verses 9-11, Luke recorded Jesus' ascension from the apostles' witness very vividly. As we read, we feel that we are there looking at Jesus going into heaven. God exalted Jesus as King of the universe. Jesus intercedes for us at the right hand of God, so that we may rise from our failures and continue our life of faith (Ro 8:34). As the apostles were looking intently into the sky as he was going, two angels said them, **“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.”**

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King Jesus will come to restore all things to the Father (1Co 15:28). He said, **“Look, I am coming soon!”** (Rev 22:7) He is delaying his coming, because he does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2Pe 3:9).

God's salvation comes to people through witnesses. Revelation 3:14 calls Jesus **“the faithful and true witness”** (Rev 3:14). Jesus came into the world to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37). He witnessed to God's saving love by giving his life on the cross. Jesus took the way to the cross, because it was the only way to bring God's salvation to the world. Had the apostles and Christians afterward not witnessed to Jesus, God's world salvation work wouldn't have continued. On their witness, the Lord Jesus has built his church and we are saved today. Without our witness, people of today would not know God's wondrous grace of salvation. Without our Christian witness, the world would soon find no light of life. From the word “witness” came the word “martyr.” Later, the apostles witnessed to Jesus until all of them except one entered into the glory of martyrdom (Rev 20:4). Witnessing to Jesus requires sacrifice. Nevertheless, God empowers his precious children to be Jesus' witnesses, because of his broken heart for perishing people. Our Lord Jesus has called us to be his witnesses so that we may share God's broken heart and also share his joy over one sinner who repents (Lk 15:10).

God's work is not possible by human will and strength. It is done by God through our obedience and prayer. In verses 12-14, Luke recorded what the apostles did. After Jesus' ascension, they returned to Jerusalem and they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. They denied their plan to go back to Galilee. They laid down their dream of an earthly messianic kingdom. They entrusted the future of themselves, their families, and their nation unto God. Then they earnestly prayed for what the Lord promised—the empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Their obedience and prayer were the beginning of God's great work and a new history.

God raised UBF in 1961 as a brethren movement of college students who found new life in Christ through the Bible study ministry of our founders, the late Dr. Samuel Lee and Mother Sarah Barry. Korea was then among the poorest countries of the world after Japanese occupation and a civil war that devastated the

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land. In spite of their country's poor and dark situation, UBF ancestors began to pray earnestly to obey the Lord's Great Commission. Since there were no means for them to go to foreign countries, they decided to raise money to send the first overseas missionary to Korea's biggest island, Jeju-do, in the far south. For this, many of them offered their bus money and walked long distances to school. Others sold their blood to support the missionary. God blessed their obedience and prayer and began to open ways for them to go out to Germany and the United States.

In the 1980s and 1990s, God gave Korea UBF periods of rapid growth. All UBF chapters fervently prayed for world missions in every meeting. Then the Holy Spirit sent out a large number of missionaries as businessmen, professionals, students, embassy workers, and even factory workers. Eventually 1,800 young people dedicated their lives as Jesus' witnesses to 96 countries. And God blessed UBF to be the 2nd largest global-scale protestant lay missionary movement after the Moravian Missionary Movement, which sent out 2,000 lay missionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries. Both the Moravian Movement and UBF Movement were the outcome of sincere Bible studies and united prayers. There are many beautiful stories of UBF missionaries and shepherds who poured out their hearts and lives to the Lord like the woman who poured her alabaster jar of perfume on Jesus (Mk 14:3-9). Through them, the Lord has built beautiful multi-cultural and cross-generational churches, and God's kingdom is advancing in the cities and campuses of the world. God has raised new generations including our children to be the main force of UBF.

Now shepherds and missionaries in Korea, North America, and Europe are beginning to retire from work. Still numerous campuses, cities, and countries of the world are waiting for missionaries and shepherds. Should we the UBF community sit complacent with our past and present? Or, should we boldly seek to explore the lands we have not yet gone? God said, **"In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."** (Ac 2:17) May God fill our senior members with the Holy Spirit so that they may dream of going out to their second mission fields, especially to 130 countries that are waiting for UBF self-supporting missionaries. The obedience and prayers of the first generation should

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flow through to the new generations. May God raise many young men and women among our new generations who embrace God's vision and pour out their hearts and lives to the Lord. Let's pray that God may raise many short-term and long-term missionary candidates through the 2018 ISBC who would reach out to all major campuses and cities in 233 countries of the world.

Now is the time for our UBF community to pray earnestly for another powerful work of the Holy Spirit. We should not be deceived by Satan's voices that people are hopelessly non-religious and God's great work is not possible in this postmodern time. The Lord predicted that this time would come. Then he said, **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"** (Mt 24:14). May we deeply accept our King Jesus' last words of promise; **"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."** May the Lord uphold us to remember his grace, rededicate our lives to him, and earnestly pray in one mind and heart. The filling of the Spirit is not a once for all experience. We will see many great works of God as we depend on the Holy Spirit and pray for his filling in us and in our community.