

## The Church Expanding

**Acts 1:8 ESV (Pg. 530)** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- I. Over the past three weeks, we have described the church as a living organism that fulfills its purpose in three ways: First, by preaching; verbally proclaiming the good news of how Jesus has redeemed fallen humanity by his substitutionary death and victorious resurrection. Second, by providing; bringing glory to God by our acts of mercy and kindness to everyone, but especially to the body of Christ. Third, by staying on mission, expanding the kingdom both at home and abroad, utilizing **both** verbal proclamation and merciful provision.
  - A. My goal today is to harmonize all of this, like a symphony conductor would do with the different instruments in an orchestra. I'll do this this using two particular passages that Don shared with us last week, one of which we already read.
    1. When I worked in radio, I learned a good interview or commercial always answered the basic questions of when, who, where, why, what and how.
    2. Answering these foundational questions is also helpful in understanding to what the church is to do as she waits for the fullness of Christ's kingdom.
  - B. The passage from Acts that we read earlier is pulled from the instructions that Jesus gave to his Apostles before his ascension to the Father. Verse 8 in particular helps us to answer the first three questions of when, who, and where.
  - C. First, we read **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come...”**
    1. We are told that we shall receive power **when** the Holy Spirit comes. Although the Holy Spirit was dramatically manifest in the initial outpouring on the church on the day of Pentecost, the Bible is also very clear that if you are his, you can be confident that you have received the Spirit.
      - a) If we would believe scripture, we must believe this truth. And we know the Holy Spirit has been given to us on purpose, for a specific purpose.
      - b) The Bible gives many reasons that the Spirit has been given, but this verse speaks of a kingdom building power that he brings to the church.
    2. While we're told that the Spirit brings power **when** he comes, **who** is the recipient of this power? It goes on to say the power comes **“when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses”**. So we must ask, who does “you” refer to? The Apostles only, or additional people as well?
      - a) This can't refer only to the Apostles for a number of specific reasons.
        - (1) After the death of Judas, there were only 11 disciples left, but Acts 1:15 tells us that about 120 people gathered in Jerusalem to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit is finally poured out, Acts 2:4 tells us that **“they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit”**.
        - (2) Furthermore, after the outpouring, Peter tells the assembled crowd of thousands **Acts 2:38b** **“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you**

**and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”**

- b) We can only conclude that power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of the worth, the power, and the presence of Christ is available to the **entire body** of redeemed people, not just a select few individuals.
  - c) That means **you and I!** We have been empowered to be sworn witnesses of all the glories of Jesus, and to point to all he's done in us personally.
3. So **where** does all this take place? **“...in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** Notice that Jesus didn't say to just be saved and filled with the Spirit and then head out randomly and start spreading the good news. He gave them a pattern. You can imagine a set of concentric circles with Jerusalem at the center as the “bullseye”.
- a) He said to start in **Jerusalem**. This was home; familiar. Here, they would have the nearness and support of each other. But it also meant that they would face hostility as they swam against the tide of their culture.
    - (1) All of us are called to start in our own version of Jerusalem. Often new believers will talk about the wonderful things they want to do for God, but they have neglected their homes and their most familiar places.
    - (2) Have you told the good news to your family? Have you been a faithful witness to the love and mercy of Jesus Christ at work and school? Have you been scorned and mocked for his Name in your hometown?
    - (3) One thing I have found to be invariably true is that you will not do in the ends of the earth what you are unwilling to do at home. At home you have the connection of brothers and sisters who love you - you may not have that the further out you travel!
  - b) Next, he told them to witness in **All Judea**. This speaks to our individual cultural context. Judea was home base for the Jews, and Jesus was speaking only to ethnic Jews at his ascension. So what is **our** Judea?
    - (1) Do you witness to the glories of Jesus in your culture, or has your life been fully absorbed by it? Does your life shout that Christ is an **accessory** in your life, or that he is the one and only **priority**?
      - (a) If I didn't know you, what would I learn about your most deeply held values from your Facebook posts and your Twitter feed?
      - (b) When your candidate wins or loses Tuesday night, how will that affect you? Will you trust the one of whom Isaiah says that “of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end”?
      - (c) Would your kids say that scripture, church life, and prayer matter in your home as much as television, the internet, jobs and sports?
    - (2) I am gravely concerned that many more believers have been changed **by** the culture instead of being ones who influence the culture. But we mustn't be satisfied with this if we want to be true followers of Jesus. We must be at constant war with our own cultural idolatries, and live lives that declare that there is no one above or beside Christ Jesus!
  - c) Next, Christ calls his disciples to boldly witness in the power of the Spirit in places where the reaction is **guaranteed** to be hostile. The relationship

between **Samaria** and Judea was entirely acrimonious. But Jesus, who for 3 years now had been telling his followers to love their enemies, now tells them how to do it practically: by taking the good news of God's love to those who are the most scary and seem to least deserve it.

- (1) What does a Samaritan look like to you? Is he or she a gang member, a prisoner or ex-convict? A drug addict or alcoholic? A homosexual or transgendered person? A Republican? A Democrat? The very rich? The wretchedly poor? A Muslim, Mormon, Buddhist, or Atheist?
  - (2) We are called to love and serve all of the above, not forgetting what we have been saved from ourselves. We should never dilute even the hardest truths of the gospel; but we must also never fail to speak and share our lives in a spirit of love, sacrifice and humility.
- d) Lastly, Jesus tells us to witness even to **The Ends of the Earth**. Throughout Jerusalem, all Judea, and Samaria, the disciples are to maintain a global perspective.
- (1) They are not to forget either those that have not heard of him, or their Christians brothers and sisters suffering around the world.
  - (2) This means the church is to be always going, praying and providing the means necessary for the proclamation of the Gospel to the farthest and most forgotten peoples of the planet.
- II. We've talked of the when, the who, and the where, but what of the why, the what, and the how? We'll have to look at another passage for that. **Matthew 28:18b ESV** "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."
- A. First let's answer the question of "why" from Jesus' words: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me".
1. With the cry of "It is Finished!" from the cross, Jesus has been anointed the undisputed King of the Universe. He is not locked in combat with the world, the devil, or even your flesh. He is the supreme and sovereign One!
  2. It is in that authority that we are sent out as his witnesses, to win for him the reward of his suffering. We go because he has commanded it, we succeed because he has decreed our success. He also promised us his constant presence! "behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- B. But **what** has he given us the authority to do in his name, empowered by his constant presence? "Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations**".
1. Our goal is so much more than getting people to pray a "sinner's prayer" or to clean up their morality. We are after a much higher goal than that.
  2. We are not satisfied until people become followers of Christ; those who are learning what it means to love him. The definition of disciple is a "learner" or "pupil". Jesus told people to "learn of him". Disciple-making facilitates that.
- C. But how do we persuade people to become followers of Christ? First by "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". This is not suggesting that baptizing someone automatically makes them a disciple, but the New Testament teaches that no one is baptized in a vacuum.

1. We are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6), sharing in his death and resurrection. We are baptized into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12). We put on Christ through baptism (Gal. 3).
  2. All of this is suggesting baptism represents an intimate connection with Christ, but also deep spiritual unity with his church. It's not popular to say, but you cannot truly be a disciple of Christ apart from the church. Baptism joins people to the community of the cross, not a religious organization, but to the living, breathing, progressing, Body of the risen Christ!
- D. It is in the context of the church that the second thing that we are called to do in order to make disciples happens. **“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”**. The church becomes vitally important in this endeavor! It is where we gather to learn what it is that Christ commanded. It is where we encourage each other with the word and share our lives in service.
- III. So we have discussed the when, who, where, why, what, and how of our preaching. If I may answer one last question, it would be this: **Why does all this even matter?** Many churches have replaced preaching, providing and missions for marketing, gimmicks, and pragmatism in order to grow. And why not? Doesn't that make more sense in the 21st century anyway? If you look at the methods of some of the largest churches in America, it seems to be working, right?
- A. My concern is that when I look at the Bible, it seems to be more concerned with proclaiming, reaching, touching, and relating, than it is with promoting, advertising and enticing. Therefore, I conclude that a church that is truly pleasing to God must be a going and sending church.
1. I fear that the last day will reveal that many more of us could have gone to our culture, or to the nations; but we were so consumed by our lust for status and stuff that we crammed our fingers in our ears so that we wouldn't hear the cries of the perishing world.
    - a) That's really not meant as a “guilt trip”. But have you ever asked God if you are to go to the world? Or maybe assist with a church plant?
      - (1) You may think you are unqualified for either of these things because you have a “secular” degree in engineering, marketing, etc., but the fact is that parts of the world that would never approve a missions visa, would love to have your practical skills to help their country, giving you a great opportunity to be a “covert missionary”.
      - (2) But for most of us, we simply have never considered it, or else we are so neck deep in our careers and other pursuits, that Jesus has to just get in line behind it all and wait for his turn (as it it will ever come).
    - b) But where are the obedient, the passionate; the ones who would despise all that this world offers in order to make Jesus famous? Who is willing to suffer with the ones we saw in the video today for the glory of Christ?
  2. I'm not suggesting that everyone is called, just that many might be neglecting God's call. But if you're not called to go, all of us are definitely called to pray and give to the global cause of reaching the world for Jesus.
- B. **Hebrews 13:3 ESV Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the (same) body.**

1. Often we live blissfully unaware of people like Asia Bibi, a Christian woman in Pakistan, who has spent almost 9 years on Death Row on a trumped up charge of blasphemy because she didn't properly honor Muhammad.
  2. This week she was released from prison, but riots broke out because of her acquittal. The government of Pakistan will not let her leave the country. She faces the very real possibility of being killed by an angry mob.
  3. We are called to pray for brothers and sisters like Asia, but we are often too concerned about our Starbuck's order, what's streaming on Netflix, or even the comforts afforded to us by our churches to care about our brothers.
- C. We all have a role to play in the expansion of the kingdom of God. No exemptions are allowed! NRLC will not fully be the church she has been called to be until we fulfill our mandate to send and go, however that looks for you individually. But who will go? Is your first reaction "Not I, Lord!" or, having seen his glory, do you pant after God, and cry out like Isaiah, "Here am I, send me!"
- IV. Today, on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, I don't want to pay lip service to our brothers and sisters around the world who are imprisoned, harassed, tortured and killed for the cause of Christ. Such a prayer would be an affront to the holiness of God. We would be better off not praying it.
- A. Instead, as Hebrews tells us, let me encourage you to remember those who are imprisoned, mistreated, separated from their families, tortured, and even killed; and to remember them as though in prison with them.
1. Try to imagine for a moment not living in a free worshipping society, always being watched, always under threat of being reported. Imagine that you could lose your freedom for simply owning a Bible, or a portion of one.
  2. Imagine your husband, wife or children watching you carted off to a filthy prison in chains, with no assurance that they would ever see you again.
- B. This is reality, not imagination, for most of the Christians living today in places like China, Nigeria, North Korea, Sudan, Iran, and several other places. As you reflect on the reality of that, do you have the guts to ask the Lord if he would have you go to one of these places? Some of you might be genuinely sensing that God is kindling something in you! Don't resist, ignore or quench that!
- C. Others might feel God leading you to the inner cities of Chicago or Detroit; or even perhaps a Native American reservation, or a small town filled with religious good 'ol boys that desperately need to hear the gospel! Don't resist!
1. At the very least, all of us should reaffirm that we belong to God and invite him to do what he will with our lives.
  2. Jim Elliot, who was martyred by Huaorani Indians in Ecuador in 1956, wrote in his journal 7 years earlier, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."
- V. Today as we come to the Lord's Table I want us to remember several things:
- A. First, that there are believers all over the world, some in small villages, some in grand cathedrals, some hiding in basements, and some in prison cells, that are joining us at the table.
1. They too are taking these elements of bread and wine and feasting, along with us, on Christ.

2. We are united by the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.  
**Ephesians 4:4 ESV** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- B. Next, as I have appealed to you all morning long, have the courage to ask God if he would have you go and bring comfort to your suffering brothers somewhere in the world, or if he would have you bring the gospel somewhere that needs it.
    1. Don't negotiate with him on the when, the where, or the how...just obediently place yourself in his hands and at his disposal.
    2. Some of you might need to start with a neighbor, a family member, or a co-worker. But if you start with the willingness to obey, you will find joy in God's call.
  - C. Last, as you partake of the bread and of the cup, remember where Christ was willing to leave to come to you. Remember what his departure cost him. Remember what joy his obedience brought to the Father, for himself, and for the whole world of those who have believed in him, and even died in him!
- VI. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- A. Pray:
    1. For the persecuted church.
    2. For willing hearts
    3. For Asia Bibi
    4. For death to the things that cause us to be deaf to God's voice.
    5. For glad rejoicing in the sacrifice and triumph of Jesus
  - B. Invite families to partake together.
  - C. Worship Team