

# Empowered Witnesses



## Acts 1: 6-24

This week, my little boy, G, who is eight, got power. I got an email at the first of the week from a friend of mine. He said, "I've got a mower, a John Deer tractor mower, 125. It's pretty old, but it is still mostly good. Do you know anyone who needs a mower?" Immediately, I thought yes, I do. I know an eight year old kid who needs a mower. I told G, "Hey G, how about we go and get a mower so you can start mowing?" His eyes light up, big smile on his face; he could not wait! He asked me every day when we would get the mower. Finally, we made the trip to my buddy's house. We loaded the mower up and brought it home. When he got it off the trailer, he cranks it up and he throttles it, and you could hear the horse power fire up. His eyes just light up, he is so excited. I show him how to push the pedal, and as he pushes it, his little butt comes off the seat. Well, it's not really made for an eight year old, so he doesn't weigh enough and he's trying to hold that pedal down, but it's good because he's got power and he's ready to go! It's getting late so he turns on the lights, and he mows

until almost 9:00, around the grain bins and just anywhere he can find to mow. Why? Because he's got power. The problem was that it rained pretty much every day last week. G would get home from school and say, "Dad, what do you want me to mow?" "Little Buddy, you can't mow today, it's raining." He would be sad and then say, "Can I just ride it around?" "Well sure, if you want to ride around that's great." So, he would get on his little John Deere 125 and rev it up. He would get his sis on there and they would just do circles around the driveway...for hours. I kept putting gas in it and he keeps going around. Then he asked if they could take it down the road, so I get behind him on our Mule and we go down the road to Memish and Papaw's house and down to the bottoms. We just go everywhere on this mower. Why? Because he's got power. I'm excited as a dad because I just love that he loves it so much.

Now, we don't have a problem with the mower yet, but we will have a problem if in a couple of weeks I come home from work, the grass is two feet tall, and G is doing donuts in the driveway. We're going to have a problem if that's what is happening, because G got power but power comes with purpose. G's gotta mower, but a mower has gotta mow. G has power, but he also needs to have purpose.

### **Power Comes with Purpose**

I think what Jesus does in Acts chapter 1 is to remind the disciples (as well as us) that yes, we have power, but our power comes with purpose. We are supposed to be doing something. We are empowered with the Holy Spirit to be witnesses. We will see that just like a mowers gotta mow, Christians gotta go. That is what we are supposed to be doing. Are you, perhaps, like G? You have power, the Holy Spirit living inside of you, but in reality, you're just doing donuts in the driveway. You are enjoying the Spirit, walking with the Spirit, you are in tune with the Spirit, which are all good things, but you also realize there is a yard that needs mowing. There is a harvest that needs reaping. Mowers gotta mow, but Christians gotta go, and we are going to see that you are given power for the purpose to be witnesses to proclaim the gospel, here, there, and everywhere.

We are going to begin reading in Acts chapter 1, verses 6–11.

## Scripture

***"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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.' 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. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and 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.'"***

## The Disciples Want Israel's Restoration

If you noticed, as we read our text it starts with a question. The disciples asked Jesus when He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel. Let's think about the context a little bit. Last week, we saw Jesus has been teaching about the Kingdom of God for forty days. Think about that. For forty days, Jesus has been teaching them, periodically, about the Kingdom of God. After forty days, their follow-up question is when will He restore the kingdom of Israel. Did you notice a subtle shift there, a subtle difference? Jesus has been teaching about the Kingdom of God and they want to know about the kingdom of Israel.

I have noticed that our questions often show our desires. The things we ask reveal what we want. If my kids ask me if I am busy, they do not just want to know if I am busy, they want something from me. They want me to play or take them somewhere. They want me to do something. When I ask Evie Kate if she is done with her burger, I am not asking if she is done with the burger, I am asking because I want the other half of it.

Our questions often reveal our wants, and here, after forty days about the Kingdom of Heaven, their burning follow-up question is what about the kingdom of Israel. In other words, Jesus is trying to teach them about the Kingdom of Heaven and all they think about is the kingdom of them, the kingdom of themselves, the kingdom of Israel...*Hey Jesus, what about us? We know the prophecies. You are supposed to fulfill Israel. The Messiah is supposed to make Israel rule all the nations with a rod, so what about Israel.*

For us, I think we can be guilty of the same thing. We can interpret Jesus wanting us to get the Kingdom of God as Jesus wanting the kingdom of us, our own kingdom. Sometimes our prayers can sound really good. "Jesus, revive your Church!" "Jesus, heal our nation!" That can be a good prayer but it can also be a very bad prayer. The reason it can be a bad prayer is because we can have wrong motivation. Sometimes we want Jesus to revive the Church and heal our nation so that we will be more comfortable in our churches and our nation. That is why we want Jesus to move and work, it is because we don't feel comfortable anymore in America because it seems like culture is getting away from the Bible. So we want Jesus to heal culture, to heal America so we can be comfortable in America, so we can feel better, so we will be on the right side of some of these issues, so we won't feel so awkward when we go out. That is a wrong motivation. It is *Jesus, do something for me...* Instead, a proper prayer would be to ask Jesus to revive the Church and heal the nation for the sake of His glory so His gospel can go to the nations.

### **Jesus Wants a Rescue Mission**

We have a people here who are asking Jesus when He is going to restore Israel. But Jesus, in the context, wants to take eleven Israelites and go rescue the nation. Do you see the difference there? Eleven Israelites are saying...*Hey Jesus, when are you going to make Israel great again?* Then Jesus says *I'm going to take Israel to rescue the nations. You Israelites, with a band of brothers and sisters, are going to go and reach the nations.* The disciples want restoration and Jesus wants rescue. Sometimes we can be so focused on our own restoration that we forget the rescue mission God has given us.

Notice how Jesus responds, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority." In other words, they are worried about what they shouldn't be worried about. They should be worried about something else.

What should they be worried about? Look with me in verse 8. The first thing Jesus says is "But..." There is a contrast. They are worried about the restoration of Israel, worried about their life becoming better, but there is something else they should be looking to. It is not restoration; it is rescue for the whole nations. We are going to see that play out. Verse 8 is the key verse in all of Acts. In a big way, this is the table of contents. Everything that is going to happen in the book of Acts is shown and previewed in this verse. The disciples are worried about restoring Israel, and Jesus is going to restore them to send them to go and rescue the nations. That is what Jesus wants them to remember, so He says, "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." That is the table of contents to the whole book of Acts. They are going to receive power at Pentecost (In the next chapter, we will see this lived out when the Spirit comes), and then it says they are going to be His witnesses. They will witness in Jerusalem first, which will be in chapters 2–7. Next will be in Judea and Samaria, which is in chapters 8–12. Then in chapters 13–28, we will see them witness to the ends of the earth. Jesus is saying He will do these things, and we see throughout Acts Jesus fulfilling what He tells them to do.

Here is the problem, I think these Israelites forgot Israel's true mission. They thought the gospel was just about them, but the gospel is about all people everywhere. They should have gotten that, because if you think of Isaiah 49:6, it says, "I will make you [God talking to Israel] as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." The plan for Israel all along was not just about Israel, but that Israel would be a light to the nations. Israel would bring salvation here, there, and everywhere, to all peoples. But here, after Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and just before His ascension, the disciples seem to forget that.

## **The Promise of Power**

Notice what we see in this text. We see two promises. The first promise is in verse 8, "You will receive power..." That sounds good! What if God came up to you and said *I am going to give you some power. How much do you want? Do you want a little bit of power, or a whole lot of power?* I would be like...*Give me a lot! That sounds great! Power from God? Yes, please!* That sounds good to me. I could do with some power in my life. I don't know what I would do with it, but it would be cool. Jesus is telling them they will have power, but there is a modifier to that statement. Where is this power coming from? He tells us, "...when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The power is going to be the Spirit in them working through them. Jesus has already talked to them about this in the gospels. He said He would send a helper [the Spirit] when He left who would guide them and tell them everything they forgot. The Spirit will lead, guide, and direct; and in the book of Acts, we see this actually happen.

Jesus, through His Spirit, builds His Church through ordinary men and women. One of the coolest things in the book of Acts is these are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. The question is how. It's because they have power. In other words, we see Jesus talking to eleven dudes who end up changing the world. How does that happen? How do eleven dudes change the world? They had help. The help is the Holy Spirit. Through these eleven, men and women go out and proclaim the gospel with the help of the Spirit, and Jesus builds His Church in the lives of men and women. The same is actually true today. Jesus is still building His Church. He is still forwarding His Kingdom through men and women just like you and me who are empowered with the Holy Spirit, and we become witnesses to the things of God. He is still on mission. He is still moving. Their mission is also our mission.

## **The Promise of Purpose**

Just like little G, they have power, but power comes with purpose. What is their power for? Why are they given the Spirit? Jesus continues with the second promise, "...and you will be my witnesses..." There is a purpose to this power. You are going to be witnesses. You will get the Holy Spirit, not

just to live a life connected to God...that is part of it. It is not just so you can put sin to death...that is part of it. It is not just so you can walk in the Spirit...that is part of it. There is more. You are given the Spirit to be a witness. That is what we have named the entire series; we are empowered witnesses. That is what the book of Acts is going to show us.

## **The Fourfold Plan**

When you think about power and how it needs purpose, purpose also needs a plan. Jesus gives them the plan...You will have power and it's going to be for purpose, you are going to be my witnesses. Here is the plan, here is what you are going to go and do. So, Jesus gives them this fourfold plan. First, they would start in Jerusalem. I can just imagine the disciples were excited about this. It's dangerous but also desirable. They want Jerusalem to know Jesus. Why is there danger? It is because they just crucified Jesus forty days ago. They knew if they went out and proclaimed Jesus they could die, but it was also desirable because they wanted their people to know Jesus. I think they were excited to get to take the news of Jesus to Jerusalem... *Yes, give us power and we will proclaim the Word to Jerusalem!*

Second, Jesus said, "...and Judea..." I can imagine them saying... *Yeah, that is great too. The country folk need Jesus. We're going to the city, Jerusalem, but the country folk need Christ too. When we get done with the city, we will go out into the country and tell all those Jews who live in Judea, all those farmers about Christ too. It sounds good! Give us the power.*

Third, Jesus said, "...and Samaria..." I can imagine at that moment them saying... *What? Hold up! Let's get back to the restoration of Israel; that sounds better. What do you mean, Samaria?* We know from the gospels that Jews don't like dealing with Samaritans and vice versa. They do not like each other. The Jews would walk around Samaria so they didn't have to pass through it just in case they ran into a Samaritan. These two groups of people did not like each other, and now Jesus is telling these eleven men Israelites from Galilee that the mission includes Samaria. They were going to have to go to a people where there was some racial tension

between them and bear witness, and proclaim the gospel. I can imagine their thoughts. *What if they respond? What if they want to follow you? Won't they mess everything up? Won't the Samaritans, who aren't like us, mess this whole thing up?* I have a feeling there was some tension when Jesus said Samaria.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He said, "...and..." I can imagine all the disciples were like *Wait, what! Who else could be included? We just included Samaria!* Jesus said, "...and to the ends of the earth." *Now, hold on Jesus. We did not sign up for this! We did not agree to this. You want us to go where? You want us to go to those people who barbeque? No, this doesn't happen. Those are unclean, filthy Gentiles! Do you know the worship they do? Do you know the things they do? We follow the Ten Commandments and they don't follow any of them! We avoid them. We don't touch them. We wash our hands when we are around them. We don't love the Gentiles. We try to stay away from the Gentiles, and you want us to go and engage them? You want us to take the things we want Jerusalem to become and give it to all of the nations?*

Jesus was blowing their minds. Not only is there power, not only is there purpose, but there is a plan, a plan to get the gospel to here, there, and everywhere. That was always the plan. They had just forgotten it. In Genesis at the very birth of Israel, God called Abraham who becomes the father of all the Israelites, and God says He will bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham. Somehow, Israel forgot that and thought God was really just about restoring them. Instead, God wants to use them to rescue the entire world for His glory. It is about "to the ends of the earth."

### **The Same Purpose and Plan Today**

That brings us into this text because we, too, have this same purpose and plan. As Hardin Baptist Church, if you are a believer, if you have been filled with the Holy Spirit, you have been empowered. Because you are empowered, you are now a witness. If you are a witness, what is the plan? See, some of us are empowered, but we have forgotten the purpose. We are like G, just riding the lawn mower around in circles, but there is a lawn that needs mowing. There is a harvest that needs gathering. Like mowers



gotta move, Christians gotta go. We may have forgotten the purpose, but we have been reminded that we have been given the Holy Spirit to be a witness.

### **What is Your Plan?**

So, what is your plan? Jesus gave the disciples a plan: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. If we are going to be witnesses, we have to think through our plan. Your plan will be unique, but we need to think through those four categories and think how we can be a witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

For you, Jerusalem could represent that place where you are, the places you live, work, and play, the places you just naturally go. How can you, empowered by the Holy Spirit, be a witness to those people around you? We start by praying for them. Then, we would look for opportunities to share things about Jesus with them. Bring up conversations about Christ around them so you can witness to how good Jesus is so that they could hear the gospel. So first, it is about bringing the gospel here, those places your feet are going to go this week where you live, play, and work. You are a witness for Christ and you are not alone. You have help. It is God in you working through you.

Then, there is Judea and Samaria. There are those places you are not naturally going to go to, but you have to make effort to go to. This might be a certain community that you think just needs some work, love, and gospel presence. You would drive to that community to spend time with those people. Maybe this is crossing a culture, crossing a different ethnic group. Think about how you can reach this group of people that lives in your own community for the sake of the gospel. Where are your Judea and Samaria? Where are those places that might be awkward for you to go? By going there, you could be a witness for Christ and He will use you there. You have to come up with a plan. How can you pray for that? How can you go towards that?

And then, there is to the ends of the earth. What does that look like? You have to make a plan for it. How are you going to be engaged in taking the gospel to all nations? How are you going to pray for the nations? How are

you going to give to the nations? How are you going to go to the nations? Praying is pretty easy, and giving is pretty easy. As a church, we give to the nations. Ten percent goes to the cooperative program that funds the mission organizations. We also support many missionaries from this church who are now in the nations. If you have given anything, you have been part of giving to the nations. But how can you do that more specifically and pointedly with your giving?

What about going? How does God want you to go to the nations? For some of you, maybe that means a vacation from work so that you can travel somewhere. To the nations means you have to pack a suitcase to get there. We aren't standing in Jerusalem looking out to the nations; instead, we are the nations. We are ones standing *in* the nations who are commanded to go *to* the nations. So, we take the gospel to the nations by praying, giving, and it might also means going. It might mean taking a week off work to go somewhere else to share the gospel, going to another country that involves a long ride or a plane to get there. Maybe for some of you it is not a vacation. Maybe God is calling you to change your vocation and relocate somewhere else so you can reach a people in the nations who don't know Christ.

I don't know what God is calling you to. I don't know the plan for your life, but I know that if you have power, you have purpose; and if you have purpose, you have to have a plan. What is the plan? How are you going to get the gospel to your Jerusalem, your Judea and your Samaria, and how are you going to get the gospel to the nations? In all three of those areas, you can think through how to pray, how to give, and how to go. We can do those things in order to get the gospel to the nations. This was their mission, but it is also our mission. We are supposed to be engaged in the same things. That is scary to some of you. You don't know if you can do what they did. You can because you have the same power. You have the power of the Holy Spirit living in you. We are like David with a slingshot. There is a giant in front of us and there are fears and anxieties around the 'what ifs' that can happen. Do you know how David stood before the giant in front of him? David knew there was a bigger giant behind him. That bigger giant is God! When we think about taking the gospel to somebody

else, there might be giants in front of us, but there is a bigger giant in us working through us, and that is God through His Holy Spirit. In other words, you have got a little help. Jesus has a throttle that He is pushing, and when He hits that throttle it goes. The power comes with purpose. The purpose is to be a witness, and if you are going to have a purpose, you have to have a plan. What is your plan to reach the nations with the gospel?

## **Jesus Ascends**

Then what happens next, I can only imagine just being there. Just imagine in the context of the disciples. They have just heard about their power, their purpose, and the plan. Then the Scripture says as Jesus was teaching He was lifted up. All of a sudden, He was lifted up. The Father was taking His Son back to Heaven by a cloud. A cloud is the imagery of the Old Testament with the tabernacle and the cloud of glory, the Shekinah glory of the Lord. We think of scenes on Sinai and the cloud, the glory of God. So Jesus is raised up in His glory and I can just imagine being a disciple and being there. How long did it take for them to figure out Jesus was floating? Have you ever thought about that? They are watching Jesus as He is teaching them. He has been teaching for forty days, so I imagine some of these lessons are getting repetitive. Maybe some of the disciples are nodding off a little bit, and then, *Whoa! Hey Peter, look!* Who is the first one to notice that? Crazy things are happening, Jesus just rose from the dead, and now He is floating up to Heaven in all of His glory in a cloud!

Then, the Bible says as He was lifted up the disciples gazed into heaven. What else could they do? They just stood there. I imagine their mouths hanging open, staring up, no words or thoughts coming out. Peter doesn't even have anything to say! The Scripture says they are gazing up and two men came to them. We know they are angels because it describes what happened at the resurrection and the tomb. The angels, I assume, are probably looking at the disciples gazing up in the clouds and thinking these guys aren't getting it...*Hey guys...hello...hey, over here!* What do the angels say? "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." Translation? *Hey guys, what are you doing? Why*

*are you standing and staring up at heaven? Didn't you hear what He said? He is coming back and you have a mission! You have purpose to be His witness to all people everywhere. You should be going!* There was a mission, Jesus had told them what to do, and now they needed to lean into it.

I just want to ask how many of us are just like the disciples? We are either preoccupied with our kingdom, with Jesus making our lives better, and we do not focus on our neighbors, or we just really love gathering together and staring up. That is a good thing, we need to behold God, think about God, we need to be gazing into heaven and think about how good Jesus is, but it doesn't stop there. We are so good at coming together and just gazing up and singing up that we forget that Jesus gave us a mission and He is about to come back down. He has asked us to do things but some of us were on our mowers just turning circles in the driveway thinking... *Woo hoo, I've got power! This is good!* But the Guy who gave you that power gave it to you because there is a yard to mow. There is grass that needs cutting. Mowers gotta mow, Christians gotta go, and you are not going. You are just waiting and staring, but He told you what to do, and that is to be His witness. He empowered you, not just to gaze up, not to be unfocused; He empowered you to be a witness to the nations.

### **Pray, Believe the Word, and Trust God**

In the rest of this chapter, three things happened before the power of the Spirit comes at Pentecost. The disciples do three things. They are devoted to prayer, devoted to the Word, and they trust God. How do we know that? It says when they gathered together they devoted themselves to prayer, and then Peter stands up and says the Word of God said that Judas would betray Jesus, and the Word of God said they needed to replace him, so they cast lots. As they cast lots, they prayed for the Lord to show them who His heart had chosen to be the next apostle to fulfill the obligation of the twelve, and God chooses Matthias. They pray, they believe the Word, and they trust God. If we are going to carry the gospel to the nations, we have to do those things too. We have to be devoted to pray, devoted to the Word, and we have to have faith in God that He will do what only He can do through us. That is what the disciples did and they ended up

changing the world. But they had a little help, well, a lot of help; they had power. They had power, but the power had purpose.

I just want to ask you. If you are believer, the truth is you have power. The Spirit of God lives inside you. If you have power, do you remember your purpose? Your purpose is to be His witness, an empowered witness. Are you living out your purpose? If you realize you have power but you have not been living on purpose, you need to get a plan. The plan is between you and the Lord, but it needs to include how you can get the gospel here, there, and everywhere. Spend some time with the Lord and figure out your plan to reach the nations for the gospel.