

V. The Holy Spirit in Biblical Perspective  
*Led by the Spirit*  
“The Empowered Witness of the Holy Spirit, Part 2”  
Acts 1:4–11  
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February 28, 2016 – Morning sermon

We will start by looking at Acts 1 which contains our theme verse for the year. Our focus is on being a Holy Spirit empowered witness of the Gospel to fulfill the Great Commission to the world. We are at the close of our Mission’s conference which we will do tonight with the coming together of the Lord’s Supper with our ethnic congregations joining us. It will be a little taste of the gathering of the marriage feast with every tribe and every nation.

Acts 1:4–11 says *[4] 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.*

*[6] So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [7] He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] 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.” [9] 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. [10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] 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 grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I kicked off our Mission’s conference by reading from the text that sets up the text we’re reading in this study. Our missionaries are ‘sent ones’ and in the book of Acts as the people would receive their commitments they would bring it and place it at the feet of the ‘sent ones’ so that is what we’ll do at the end of our study. We will bring our faith promise cards to the front placing them in front of our missionaries consecrating it to the Lord as you anticipate what the Lord is going to enable you to do in this coming year, specifically for the cause of international fulfillment of the Great Commission – the Gospel to the World. We set aside 40 percent of our every member commitment that is devoted to fulfilling the Great Commission locally, regionally and nationally but this is our faith promise commitment in which 100 percent of this goes to the cause of sending the Gospel around the world.

I want to give you a brief glimpse inside my heart on this. There are four things on my heart as we come to this today and this season of commitment for world evangelism and the international fulfillment of the Great Commission. One of those things is that you would all be moved specifically and strategically to engage in intercessory prayer for the work of the Gospel to all the nations. I’m going to trust the providence of God to put together a great prayer program as God leads you and you have had this entire week for God to be leading you. James 4:2b–3 says *[2b] You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* We want to pray for Christ’s work to the world.

The second thing on my heart is that you would be committed to faith promise giving. Last year was a great year because for the first time in the history of this congregation we went over 50 percent in participation in faith promise. That also showed up in the amount that was given and that amount went way beyond the hallelujah goal. It was extraordinary what the Lord did through you and I praise God for it. I can't tell you what a privilege it is to serve the Lord with you where I constantly see your generous and sacrificial heart for the cause of the Kingdom that men and women might hear the Gospel of Christ. As much as I rejoice in 50 percent I'm kind of a 100 percent guy. If I can say I'm all in, in a football stadium then I can sure say I'm all in for the sake of the Great Commission. I would like for all of us to be in and I'm not sure how the Lord will have you participate for that is between you and the Lord but for all of us to be engaged in that prayer commitment and faith promise where you say to the Lord "What are you leading us to believe by faith to bring to us to give and we promise when You get it to us that it will go through us. We now know where it's going." This way you are a part of it financially as well.

I not only want you to hear testimonies but I want you to have one. I want you to know what it means to bring that in, what you trusted Him for and then to see how the Lord uses it. I recently saw a commercial that said 'will a pair of jeans make your life meaningful? No, a pair of jeans won't make your life meaningful so buy this course so you can learn a new language.' Ok so we didn't quite get there though I'm all for learning another language but to make that investment and see how your investment reports come back at the next year's conference is what is exciting. You get to hear what the Lord is doing all around the world.

Thirdly, particularly to young couples, I praise God for our Global ministries team and I would love for some of our young couple to be on that Global ministries team in order to gain from their experience and being mentored by them. This is a congregation that is absolutely committed to this cause of world evangelism.

Fourthly is to those who are wondering if they are being called to cross cultural ministry to be a cross cultural missionary. This doesn't mean Briarwood is going to pay your way to have a cross cultural experience. No, we are going to support people who go do evangelism, discipleship, church planting and church revitalization. We don't just support people who want a cross cultural experience but we want people who are called and gifted by the Lord to send them. You may sense that the Lord is calling you to this. Brian, our mission's pastor has something that will help you move toward that investigation. So he will be available to help you figure that out.

I have other things on my heart. I love our new mission's pastor and I have been praying for him to be encouraged. You all have been so encouraging as well but can you imagine him having to follow our previous mission's pastor, Tom Cheely. I kind of know what it means to follow a legend for I followed the first legendary pastor of Briarwood, Frank Barker. Even more than that I want you to be encouraged as well as you are hearing what the Lord is doing and you're participating in what the Lord is doing. As we come to a close in our mission's conference we're all going out for you're either a mission field or a missionary, one of the two. So we're all missionaries as well as our cross cultural missionaries but there are just a couple of things I want you to think about as we look at this text in Acts.

We kicked off our mission's conference knowing that our focus was that you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be empowered witnesses to the world. To get there let's go back to where the Lord peaked their interest for Acts 1. We're coming up on Easter and I know who preached the first Easter sermon. It was Jesus and He used

the Old Testament as His text. It is recorded in Luke 24:27 which says [27] *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* Then He said that they were witnesses of these things. I am sending you out as My witness but before I send you out I want you to go back and wait for power from on high. I'm going to send the Promise of the Father upon you. Then I will send you clothed with power to be My witnesses. That was His sermon.

As you would expect Jesus was a Presbyterian preacher because He had three takeaways in that sermon (smile). Takeaway number one was that He was the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament. Everything back there is all pointing to Jesus. All the prophecies, precepts, promises, types, symbols, sacrifices and shadows are all coming to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He explained Himself in all the Scriptures and that He had to go to the cross to save His people from their sins. It's at the cross where we get a true Good News message that you yourself couldn't get to heaven but there is a God that has come down from heaven, His Son who in that cross is the fulfillment of the Old Testament where the grace of God met the justice of God and the love of God met the righteousness of God and kissed to save sinners by the grace of God to the glory of God as a gift of redeeming grace that is given to you.

Now takeaway number two is that you are My witnesses. You go tell everyone that this is historically verified. He has witness after witness after witness after witness because this is an astounding and astonishing message. I want you to be My witnesses and I am sending you to Jerusalem and the whole world. I'm sending you into a pagan world and this message is a scandal because nobody wants to believe it. Nobody is born with a heart that wants to believe this message. We don't want to be told we're sinners or that we can't save ourselves or that our religion can't save us and that we need a Savior. That is a scandal and you will meet opposition but that is where I'm sending you. But I'm not sending you out until I send you back.

Takeaway number three is that the Father has promised the same Holy Spirit that came upon Me when I ascend will be poured out upon you. There are fifteen documented appearances of Jesus recorded in the Gospels after His resurrection and Paul appeals to them. Paul tells them to go ask those who saw Him because if Jesus hasn't risen then we're a bunch of idiots. There was 500 at one time that He appeared to. Earlier He had an appearance at Galilee at a mountain and when He saw them He said "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth, so go therefore to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded and I am with you always even to the end of the age." All authority is Mine.

In Luke 24 and in Acts 1 He now says "All power is yours. I will pour out My Spirit upon you. He will seal you. He will indwell you. He will anoint you. He will empower you" therefore this Kingdom is unstoppable. When it has gone to all the nations then the King who laid aside the privileges of His majesty to go to that cross to save us from our sins, has now ascended and in that enthronement now sends forth His Spirit upon us so that we can fulfill this mission. When this mission is fulfilled, all the nations have heard the Gospel and all His people have been sealed into Christ, then He comes again, even as you saw Him ascend He will come again in glory. So He has been with them 40 days and has given them this message.

So He had all of these various meetings in those 40 days and He has arrived at the Mount of Olives. Here is the last meeting and He is now ascending back up into glory from Bethany at the Mount of Olives. As He is ascending they say 'we have one more question, is it at this time that You're going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?' First of all they have understood that the Kingdom of God had been entrusted to the Kingdom of Israel and all of

God's promises have now come to fruition through the King of Kings, the Prophet greater than all Prophets, the Priest greater than all Priests and Lord of Lords. Now they know this Kingdom is no longer entrusted to Israel.

Who is the Kingdom entrusted to? It is entrusted to His church. In Acts 1:6 it says 'when they came together' and that is the verb form of the name for 'church,' the ecclesia. Here is the embryonic New Testament church getting their marching orders from the King for the Gospel of the Kingdom to go to all Kingdoms of the world. Now back to their question of when will He restore the Kingdom back to Israel. Jesus says "It's not for you to know times and epochs but as for you, you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit shall come upon you. You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world and that is what I now give to you." In other words, they are asking for a prophecy conference and He says 'no, we're going to have a prayer meeting.'

I thought about this, this last week as I was working through this text. What if I were to say there would be a prophecy conference this coming Tuesday to know what God is going to do in the Middle East in the next 25 years? It would be pretty crowded. What if I said we're going to have a prayer meeting to pray for God's Spirit to empower us to fulfill the Great Commission? We get interested in the prophecy conferences and Jesus wants us to get interested in the prayer meetings when the Spirit of God comes upon His people.

People think Jesus didn't answer their question here but just redirected them to the Great Commission. I think He answered their question because the Kingdom has now been entrusted to the church. The church is to take this Gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations. The first thing He tells you about the Kingdom is that it is a spiritual Kingdom that the Holy Spirit is enabling. The second thing He tells them about the Kingdom of God that has been entrusted to the church is that it is an international Kingdom. It is going to all the nations and is not belonging to any one nation. The third thing He teaches is that this Kingdom is an expanding Kingdom – from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and to the utter most part of the world. The fourth thing He tells them is that this Kingdom is a powerful Kingdom. Its citizens are empowered by the Holy Spirit. It has the weapons of the Spirit, not the weapons of this world. The fifth thing He tells them is that this Kingdom is an intentional Kingdom. It goes from one place to the next place to the next place etc. It goes from Jew to Gentile from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the utter most part of the world.

The one little piece about the power of the Kingdom that comes through the Holy Spirit, all of this is possible because the King has risen and He has poured out His Spirit. Luke who wrote the book of Acts also wrote the book of Luke and that is 33 years of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Incarnate Christ. The body of Christ has brought the glorious fulfillment of the Gospel of the Kingdom. He ends it with His Savior resuming back to His glory but this time it is glorified and transformed for all eternity. Then when He arrives He tells them He is going to pour out His Spirit upon body number 2. Body number 2 is the church of Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts is also 33 years. It is 33 years of the Holy Spirit empowered witness of Christ through the body of Christ. First, it goes to Jerusalem which we see in Acts 1 through 8 and then to Judea and Samaria in Acts 9 through 12. Then the Gospel goes to the world which we see in Acts 13 through 28. Then it ends with this verse; Acts 28:31 says *[31] proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance*. The book of Acts doesn't end like all these other books for it ends by continuing because this body continues to do its work until all the nations have heard and all of His people have been gathered in. Then Jesus in body number one will return in like manner.

We are engaged in that same thing that they were engaged in. So the book of Acts becomes the narrative of the empowered witnesses of Christ going from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and the utter most parts of the world in which ends. It doesn't end with a period but it ends with dot, dot, dot, dot because we're not through yet. That is why we have this mission's conference and why we reach Birmingham to reach Alabama to reach North American to reach the world for Christ. He is not through yet. How do I know He is not through yet? It is because He hasn't come back yet. All of His people are to be gathered in and that's what we're in engaged in and called to do.

In the book of Acts we see the Gospel work unfolding. What is the answer for Israel? We're not going back to the Old Testament of sacrifices, incense and priesthoods and all for that was all fulfilled in Jesus Christ once and for all, yes and amen. But this glorious Gospel that has now gone to the nations, the same church that takes it to the nations will intentionally take it back – the Gospel to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. That is what we take back, what came to us through them. That is what God has called us to do and we're still engaged in this enterprise.

Briarwood is not innovative or exotic or ingenious. We just looked at the book of Acts and saw how they shook the world. Acts 17:6b says *[6b] These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.* How did they turn the world upside down? They took the Gospel and did evangelism and discipleship. They evangelized the up and inners and the down and outers. They evangelized men, women, families and households. They even evangelized lawyers! One of them actually became an Apostle and his name was Paul. He was a lawyer that became a religious terrorist and then became a preacher of the Gospel – that is amazing grace right there! There were business men who became preachers of the Gospel like Philemon and Barnabas. There were business women like Lydia and demon possessed girls who spread the Gospel. It is amazing what this Gospel is doing.

As the Gospel is going out you also see these church plants and when they get in trouble they send people back for church revitalization. They were putting churches all over the place and strengthening churches. Out of the 27 provinces in the book of Acts where they planted churches, 22 of them were capitals and then they planted them in rural areas so they go where there are people of power and where those who are discouraged are. They go everywhere with the Gospel and not just any one place. When they go to these places there is also compassion and mercy. If there is a famine or widows they want to help. There are Gospel words that are authenticated by Gospel deeds.

Then as the evil empire strikes back with persecution then God's sovereign mercies are always intervening. Sometimes He takes His people onto glory in the midst of persecution and sometimes He delivers them from it but it is always the tapestry of God's glory and our good that is working out as the Gospel is going forward. Then as it is going forward where many are being added to the body every day, we also see these persistent prayer meetings going on all over the place for this Gospel power to keep moving. They had their own versions of faith promise giving with their sacrificial giving when they would just sell what they owned to help others. One guy sells so much that two things happens – one is they get so excited about him that they change his name to Barnabas (the encourager) and then there were those who would try and imitate that like Ananias and Sapphira. There is the Gospel that is going to all the world.

Jesus said 'As the Father sent Me so send I you.' What did the Father send Jesus to do? He sent Him to seek and save the lost – the Gospel to the world. What did the Father do when He sent Jesus? He sent the Holy Spirit upon Him. What does Jesus do? He sends us to seek and

save the lost. He sends us out by first sending us back that the Holy Spirit would clothe us with power just as He was clothed with power in body number one and body number two is clothed with power so that we go to the world. No matter what takes place we are able to stand for Christ – see His blood you're forgiven in Christ, see His righteousness you're accepted in Christ for it clothes you, see His Spirit you're empowered in Christ brought from death unto life in Christ. We are here to bear witness of this Christ.

Where we can't be a witness we send other witnesses out there to other cultures, ethnicities and countries. So this multi-dimensional impact of the Gospel is taking place and we are bearing witness. There is a Savior who takes you where you are and never leaves you where you are but grows you by His grace and He'll take you to glory. He has gone away to prepare a place for you so that where He is there you will be also and He will come again to bring you to Himself. Until then He has a mission for you and so we engage in that mission.

Last year we not only met the Hallelujah goal but we went beyond that goal. All of sudden here are these extra resources. Because of your prayer commitment, sacrificial giving and God's supernatural intervention we were able to plant a church where the tsunami destroyed the nuclear facility in Japan and the hope of the Gospel is there. We were able to plant a church in Nepal that we hadn't even planned on doing. We planted two churches in South Africa in rural areas where people literally live on trash heaps. I plan to visit there in a few months riding in the truck that we were able to purchase through those extra resources and so will our mission's team. We were able to start a Bible Institute in Honduras.

Do you hear the theme of this? What did all this giving do? It enabled church planting, church revitalization, evangelism, discipleship, leadership multiplication and mobilization. He loves to take cowards like Peter and turn them into courageous spokesmen for the Gospel. The same man who denied Jesus confessed Him. He takes a religious terrorist and turns him into a preacher of the Gospel. You see leaders who were multiplied and mobilized in the book of Acts and we're still doing that today.

Because of your giving we were also able to put this subcommittee on the persecuted church that we are engaged in. Do you realize that over twice as many people lost their lives for Jesus Christ in 2015 than in 2014? It doubled. There are 51 countries with state approved persecution of the Christian church. There are over one million of your brothers and sisters who have no place to live now because of that persecution. They are called refugees. 35 of those 51 countries are embracing Islamic Jihadist and we actually have an evangelistic training program for those who were converted on how to share the Gospel with other Muslims. In one area they are averaging starting 15 Bible studies a week. That was also a result of your giving last year and what God did supernaturally with prayer and our giving.

As the Father sent Me so send I you. I had been to Uganda eight times and I stood in the killing fields where there was a road where 500 of your brothers and sisters had been buried as road filler. Ubote and Amin were now gone and the church of Jesus Christ was moving. There I was in the rural area with 250 plus pastors walking out of the bush every day for five days to be trained in terms of pastoral ministry in teaching, preaching and leadership. There was a man there who was a deacon in the church who probably was no taller than 5 foot 3. Every day he would walk three miles to get me something to drink because he knew I wouldn't last without it. I told him he didn't need to do that but he said 'your people sent you here and we are so grateful.' I had given everything I brought with me away and to this man I gave him a shirt, tie, socks and a few other things plus my suitcase.

When I gave those things to him he said “I am a deacon and I will make sure people who need this get it.” He had worn the same thing every day for five days and he washed them each night. I said “No, these are for you.” As I turned to leave I saw him walk up to the Communion Table and placed those things I gave him on the Table. He didn’t know I was watching. He raised his hands and said “Jesus, thank You for sending Pastor Reeder. Thank You for sending this to me. I give myself to You.” I love world evangelism. I love to pray for it and I love to give to it. I love to see what the Lord does. I’m grateful to love the Lord with you and for your love for the Lord. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to serve You, follow You, know You and love You. We commit this time to You. Pray to see how the Lord would use you in world missions. Let the Holy Spirit empower you so that you can express it. Lord, we give ourselves to You because You gave Yourself for us as we surrender all, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.