

ACTS | INTRODUCTION

Rob Rogers September 19, 2021

Introduction

During the Industrial Revolution in France in the mid-18th century there was enormous social tension between the haves and the have nots, and it ended in a bloody revolution. About the same time, Britain was facing very similar tensions and problems. It looked like Britain should have ended up in the same kind of bloody revolution — but something different happened instead.

The entire country was caught up in the Evangelical Revival in England — the Great Awakening, as it spilled over into the American colonies. God used John Wesley, Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and others to preach the gospel. People began surrendering their lives to Christ by the thousands, and this revival lasted for several decades! Around one fifth of the population of Britain found themselves swept up in the new life God was breathing over that suffering land.

What happened as a result was not a bloody revolution — but a resurrection — a nationwide renewal.

Why?

- Because the gospel taught those with wealth to be more generous and compassionate with their wealth.
- The gospel gave the poor a new power and new vision for discipline and work ethic.
- This revival led to the abolishment of the slave trade in the British Empire
- Instead of death, destruction, and division — there was life, revival, and a spiritual and societal renewal that impacted the world for generations

Considering all the problems we are currently facing personally, as a community, as a country, as a church — HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN HERE AND NOW?

One of the major problems in our culture is...

- we often think that what we need is some new knowledge
- some piece of information we don't yet have
- we often feel like we're missing out
- that we need understanding of some secret that other people have
- or there's some trick to life that we're missing
 - that's why the self-help industry is raking in billions of dollars every year — they've learned to capitalize on this

IMPORTANT: But what the Evangelical Revival and the Great Awakening tell us, and what we're going to see throughout this series on the book of Acts is that **what we need most is not some new secret knowledge to breathe life into something ancient. But something ancient, something transcendent to inform how we navigate the new challenges we face.**

Because 2,000 years ago there was one of the most well-documented revivals and spiritual awakenings in human history — and it reformed one of the most remarkable, seemingly unstoppable civilizations ever built. This awakening changed not just that empire, but it changed the trajectory of human history. It

began with a tiny little group of nobodies. They had no political power, no position, no status, no educational advantages, no economic power, no influence, or sway. This little group of nobodies started something that within two centuries had swept up millions of people all throughout the Roman Empire into a revolution of JOY, of HOPE, of PEACE that they'd never known or thought possible.

This revolution, this revival, this awakening — the birth of the Church is exactly what we're going to be looking at — starting today.

The Purpose of the Church

ACTS 1:1-8

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. ³ He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

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.”

What happens next is Christ ascends to the right hand of the Father — so that He might send the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to come upon us with power — in order that we might become Christ's witnesses, His representatives, His ambassadors, His messengers of hope to a broken, divided, and fallen world.

In Acts 1:8, in **one single verse** is the anchor, the purpose, the mission statement of the entire book of Acts. *It is not only the foundation of the Acts of the Apostles **but also the very purpose of the Church.*** It is the structure of the entire book, and what we'll be using as the structure for our series.

*Today there is confusion about what the Church is, what it means to be a follower of Christ, why God put us here, and what our mission is. It is critical that we understand what God's design for the Church is! *Who are we to be in the world?* How are we to live and conduct ourselves?*

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:8

But you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...

- some Christians get excited when we start talking about the Holy Spirit, and there are others that get nervous.
- within Christendom, there are some people that want to act like the Holy Spirit doesn't exist, because He's the wild, unpredictable part of the Trinity

- then there are those who only build every single aspect of their Christianity on experiences with the Holy Spirit.

As Pastor Myron says it in our equipping classes, **“We want everything that the Holy Spirit wants to give us, nothing more, nothing less.”**

What is clear in scripture is that you place your trust in Christ for Salvation — you are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the guarantee of your heavenly inheritance.

Ephesians 1:13

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

But there is a major difference between being *sealed with the Holy Spirit* — your salvation being secure — and having the Holy Spirit *come upon you with POWER*. Being baptized, clothed in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tells His disciples in....

Luke 24:49

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are **clothed with power from on high.**

The Power to Be Witnesses

What is this power for?

Why did Jesus command them to stay in this city until they received power?

And what is the purpose of the power?

It's power for the mission. *It's the amplifying and activating power of the Holy Spirit that takes what God has created you to do — giving you a supernatural, surge of power — not to make much of yourself, but to make much of Jesus.*

*And the scripture commands us to not just receive this filling — this clothing in — this baptism of the Holy Spirit not just once, but **over and over again.***

Luke 11:9-13

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Why do we need to continually seek, knock, and ask, that our Father in Heaven would fill us with the Holy Spirit, that He would clothe us with power from on high?

So that you, follower of Jesus might be empowered for the mission!

- because if you are a Christian, you are a missionary
- if you are a missionary, you've been given a mission
- if you have a mission, then there will be moments when you will need to be enveloped, clothed in power
- filled with the spirit of the living God
- to amplify the gifts within you to fulfill the preordained purposes that God has planned for you.

What does God want to give us power to be?

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my **witnesses...**

This word witness appears 29 times in the book of Acts. And our typical definition of a witness is someone that tells what they've seen and heard. It carries with it the idea of someone who testifies in a court of law.

The original word for witness is *martys*, it's where we get our word, *martyr*.

G.K. Chesterton writes about the fact that a martyr is someone who cares so much for something outside themselves, that they forget their own personal life. It's not about caring so little for life that you're willing to lose it... it's that there is a cause outside of themselves that is so great, they're willing to incur deep and personal suffering, they are willing give up their own life for it to continue... ¹

- Martyrs are willing to die so that something beyond themselves might live
- There is no victimhood in it
- it is a passion for something beyond themselves
- *This is why we need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit!*
- The Holy Spirit will come upon you with power
- You will be my martyrs.
- You will receive power to suffer
- Jesus is saying, *you will receive power to die to yourself, as I have.*
- *To carry your cross, as I have.*
- *And in your suffering, your life will be a witness, a testimony of Me.*

2 Timothy 3:12

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

1 Peter 4:14-16

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Matthew 5:10

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹ Chesterton, Gilbert K. *The Essential Gilbert K. Chesterton Volume I* (Simon and Schuster, May 13, 2013)

2 Corinthians 12:10

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

An Eternal Kingdom Not of this World

What's difficult to understand is how even after all Jesus did, and all He taught, there are is often a desire for a Christ without a Cross. There can be a dangerous belief that you can be a follower of Jesus without following in the ways of Jesus.

Just like the disciples in the early church, even in our passage...

Acts 1:6

"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

They were continually asking for Jesus to bring an earthly kingdom, and a victory that didn't involve suffering, or death. They wanted a war waged in ways of the world, and NOT in the ways of God.

And God, in the very foundation of the ancient, and early church, HE says, you will receive power to be my witnesses, martyrs, to suffer for My name's sake. And in suffering — you will bear witness of me.

*Alistair Begg talks about how at Jesus' arrest in the garden, too often we're like Peter, picking up swords, trying to cut people's heads off — meanwhile Jesus is putting ears back on people's heads, saying, "Have you learned nothing! My kingdom is not of this world, if it were, my followers would rise up and fight... **but my kingdom is NOT of this world, and it is the very crushing of my body, that will fuel the birth of My church!**"²*

In fact, Alistair tells a story of a man in the 1920's who helped establish the British Broadcasting Corporation. Lord Reith served as the first director-general.

"As the BBC began to be carried along by the tide of secularism that swept through Britain in the 1960's, a young producer stood up in a meeting and said to Lord Reith that the world was changing, and that the BBC did not need to continue with its religious programming. People were no longer interested in religion, he said, and the church was becoming increasingly obsolete.

Lord Reith, who was 6'6", told this young man to take his seat. Then he stood up and said: "The church will stand at the grave of the BBC."

And you know what? It will. IT will stand when the BBC — and CNN and Fox as well — will dwindle and die. God's kingdom will stand when every organization and institution and empire meets its end."³

~ Alistair Begg

This is what God has invited us to be a part of...

- Not some temporary man-made organization.
- Not an institution.
- Not a 21st century activist movement

² Begg, Alistair. *Made for His Pleasure* (Moody Publishers, Aug 7, 2018)

³ Begg, Alistair. *Brave by Faith* (The Good Book Company, May 1, 2021)

But an eternal Kingdom that is not of this world.

- a kingdom that will never die
- this Kingdom is unshakeable, indestructible
- in neighborhoods, communities, and cities all around the world
- this Kingdom has embassies called the church
- we are Kingdom ambassadors

And God has called us and empowered us to be not His militants — but His martyrs.

*“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”⁴
~ Tertullian*

Witnesses to the End of the Earth

What we’re going to see throughout the book of Acts is that God birthed the Church ***not only*** through His own suffering and death, ***but also*** through the self-sacrificing nature of those early disciples, who allowed their lives to be crushed for the sake of the gospel.

Acts 1:8

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**.

And when this power comes upon you — continually filling you — as you are wrapped up in, enveloped by, and clothed in power from on High — God is gifting *you* with *the what* you need to be His witness — one willing to suffer for the cause of Christ.

*In fulfilling this calling, the world-changing power of the gospel will be carried to...
Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

When these words were spoken in Jerusalem — you and I were the ends of the earth.

**The same power that they received
is the same power that’s available to us right now. Today.**

**The same purpose God was calling them to,
is the same purpose He’s calling us to, today.**

**The same plan, Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth —
is the same plan He has for us today.**

⁴ Tertullian of Carthage. *Apology of Tertullian* (Calclassian Publishing Company, Nov 2, 2019)

Book of Acts Study Plan

Throughout this series — there are roughly 44 different individual stories that make up the book of Acts.

- We're going to preach one passage on Sunday morning.
- Then Sunday afternoon we're releasing a video to our Life Groups and to the rest of the church for the following passage.
- Essentially, I'll be preaching one story
- Then the video will address the next story —for personal reflection, or discussion in your Life Group
- Then the next week I'll preach the following story
- It's like spiritual leapfrog

We're doing this to encourage the entire church body to open your own Bibles, get into the Scriptures and dig into what God did in and through the early Church — that we might glean a deeper understanding of what God might want to do with us here and now — as we receive power to be His witnesses, in Middle Tennessee, the Southeastern US, and to the ends of the earth.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think our culture believes we need new knowledge, new information — that we're missing out on some secret of life? How can we address that to those we know?
2. How is the purpose of the church, and our personal purpose, summed up in Acts 1:8?
3. Why do we need to continually need to seek, knock, and ask that our Father would fill us with the Holy Spirit?
4. What does God want to give us power to be?
5. Have you ever been persecuted for being a Christian?
6. What is your Jerusalem, Judea, end of the earth? Are you prepared to take the gospel wherever He leads you?

NOTES