

Our Capability For Witnessing

Acts 1:4-8

A husband was on his way to pick up his wife at the airport. She was flying into British Columbia, which meant he had to go through customs. As he pulled up to the booth, the agent asked the nature of his visit to Canada and how long he expected to be in the country. The man explained that he was on his way to the airport to pick up his wife who was arriving from her stay in England. Without missing a beat, the customs agent asked in all seriousness if he had cleaned the house and put fresh flowers on the dining room table.

Last week we began our series on witnessing noting the commission given by Jesus to His disciples and really to all disciples, regardless of the era in which we live, that we are to be witnesses. A term often tossed around from time to time is to **“occupy till I come.”** We are to keep busy doing what the Lord has commanded by being prepared for His return, engaging in the culture as a light for Christ. That preparation includes not only in how we live by maturing in our faith, but also certainly the task, the job, the responsibility of sharing our faith as we have been instructed to do until He returns.

Our passage today helps us understand how that task is accomplished. Where last week we looked at our commission, today we will consider from **Acts 1:4-8** our capability for witnessing.

God does not send out His servants to do a task that He will not equip them to achieve. In other words, He gives us what we need to do what He asks. A business wouldn't send its sales force out without giving them an understanding of the product they are trying to sell.

An army wouldn't send out its forces without equipping them to succeed in battle.

God won't send out His disciples without providing them with the resources to do the task of witnessing.

We see first the disciples' waiting for the Spirit.

I. THE DISCIPLES' WAITING FOR THE SPIRIT – vv. 4-5

For context, let's begin in **verse 1**.

Luke, is writing to a man named Theophilus. His name means one who loves God. Some take that to mean Luke is writing in general to a group of people who love God and not to an individual. But Luke uses a term that almost certainly identifies this as a person and not a collective group. The term **“most excellent”** confirms the idea that he was perhaps a high-ranking Roman official or at least someone with considerable status and wealth. Some suggest that Theophilus may have been Luke's sponsor who paid to have his gospel and this book of Acts copied and distributed. The opening verse serves as a type of dedication, like you find in many books today. It's common practice today and was back in Luke's day as well.

According to **Luke 1**, Theophilus was more than just a benefactor. We learn that what Luke was writing in these two volumes served to instruct him as well as encourage the faith of all who read it.

As one author wrote **“It was written to strengthen the faith of all believers and to answer the attacks of unbelievers. It was presented to displace disconnected and ill-founded reports about Jesus. Luke wanted to show that the place of the Gentile Christian in God's kingdom is based on the teaching of Jesus. He wanted to commend the preaching of the gospel to the whole world.”**

Acts is a natural segue from Luke to show how the commission of Jesus unfolded as the disciples and Paul took the good news of eternal life through Christ to the whole world.

Looking at **verses 4-5** we see first from **verse 4** their command to wait.

A. Their Command To Wait – v. 4a

It is hard to wait.

Asking a dog to sit and wait while a juicy bone is inches from his nose is a challenge as it looks at you with those sad puppy eyes.

After a child has done something bad, a child can wait a long time when they are told to wait till their

father comes home, but they can't wait when it involves a trip to get ice cream or to the zoo.

The opening verses tell us that for some 40 days, the Lord has been meeting with the disciples giving them instructions before He was about to depart. It says in **verse 3** that they were given many convincing proofs that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had watched Him die on the cross at the unmerciful hands of the Romans. They had seen Him buried, but after His resurrection Luke says there were many convincing proofs that He was alive. I like and even prefer the KJV rendering where it says after many **"infallible proofs."** To me that means it was undeniable, irrefutable, unquestionable, unarguable, flawless, accurate, unerring, unfailing evidence. A person either has a hard or uncaring heart not to see the evidence.

How is that for convincing proof? We aren't told how many times He met with them, but I believe it was more than just a couple of times. We can only well imagine the excitement they must have felt about Jesus right then. They were chomping at the bit to get out there and proclaim that the Jesus who was brutally crucified was alive and they had the proof of it. But Jesus told them to wait.

The dictionary defines that word as **"staying in a place or remaining in readiness or anticipation."** Something was going to happen, and they weren't just supposed to sit idly by twiddling their thumbs. What Jesus told them and what I take the word wait to mean implies that they should be at the ready, be watchful. **When I played basketball, some of us waited on the bench but had to be ready when called on to get in the game.**

It's my belief that the event at the seashore after Jesus's resurrection where Peter decided he was going to return fishing happened before this command to wait. Something important was about to happen that they would need to help them in their mission of witnessing. It would provide them the capability to share the gospel, without which they would not be ready and even fail.

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you heard Me speak

about."

Think for a moment what must have been going through their minds when they were told to wait in Jerusalem. That was the scene where weeks earlier Jesus had been rejected by the Jews and crucified. Then three days later His body went missing from the grave. The story was spread that the disciples came in the night and stole the body. I imagine that a price was on their head. Catch them and silence them for good so that the false spin on the truth couldn't be refuted. It was a big risk to stay in Jerusalem. You may remember that before the crucifixion when Jesus announced He was going to Bethany to see Martha and Mary after the death of Lazarus, at which time He would raise Him from the dead, the disciples tried to convince Jesus not to go because the religious leaders wanted to kill Him. Thomas spoke up and said that if Jesus was going to go to die, he was going with Him to die too.

Waiting in Jerusalem was a big risk of being found out. But from **verse 12** that's what they did.

John Phillips gives us an interesting perspective on what the disciples may not have realized in their waiting when he writes: **"In the shelter of the upper room they could have no idea of the impossibility of the task, of the stubborn unbelief of men, of the entrenched, vested interests of government, commerce, and religion that would oppose them, or of the cruel persecution that awaited them."**

It was probably best they didn't know all that, though Jesus did warn them that if He was persecuted, they should expect the same. But wait, they did. **Would we wait? Could we wait?**

What were they to wait for? Notice in the second part of **verse 4 and verse 5** their cause for waiting.

B. Their Cause For Waiting – vv. 4b-5

They were to wait for the promised gift of the Father, which Jesus told them about. They were to wait for the baptism of the Spirit.

Simply put, the baptism of the Spirit puts the believer into the body of Christ. It's important to understand the difference between the baptism of

the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit can happen many times over the life of a believer. The filling of the Spirit is for the purpose and was necessary for service. We see it on several occasions in the Old Testament.

In **Numbers 28:17**, we are told that Joshua was filled with the Spirit.

Bezalel was filled with the Spirit in order to perform all the tasks required by God when He instructed Moses on how everything was to be built or made relating to the Tabernacle from the utensils and furniture to the curtains and structure and even the ark of the covenant. (**Exodus 31:3**)

On another occasion we read in **I Samuel 10:10** that Saul was filled with the Spirit and prophesied alongside another group of prophets. People asked if Saul was among the prophets too.

I Samuel 16:12-13 “So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him (David) in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.”

The filling of these individuals by the Holy Spirit was for the purpose of serving God in some way. The baptism of the Spirit is unique to what we call the church age, in that when a person trusts Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit is promised to reside within the believer and so unite him to Christ and to every other believer. Again, this is a one-time experience that occurs at the moment of salvation.

John the Baptist predicted it in **Mark 1:8** where he spoke of his baptism by water, but then also spoke of the Messiah who would come baptizing with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the same thing here in **v. 5**. This promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost seen in **Acts 2:1-4**.

The central passage on the baptism of the Holy Spirit is in **I Corinthians 12:12-13**.

Nowhere in Scripture are we told to seek the baptism of the Spirit. **I Corinthians 12:13** states that every believer has been baptized by the Spirit. And then in **Ephesians 4:5**, the inference is to the

baptism of the Spirit, which is a reality for every believer at salvation indicated by “**one faith**” and “**one Father.**”

Now, let me clarify something here before we move on. I don’t want to suggest that the disciples were not saved until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit Baptized them. But I do believe that what happened on that day was a confirmation of their salvation so that they knew without a shadow of a doubt they were born again. This event marked the beginning of the church.

That event started a whole new relationship for the believer who would be permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit to empower them for service. We don’t seek the Spirit or His power, WE have the Spirit and His power.

Let me just add one more thought. The word “**baptized**” is in a voice in the Greek that signifies what occurs only through divine activity. In other words, we can’t seek it and don’t earn it. It is always and only through the divine work of God in the believer, and it happens at salvation.

They were told to go to Jerusalem to wait for this gift from the Father. But that prompted some questions. We see next that the disciples’ wondering about the Spirit.

II. THE DISCIPLES’ WONDERING ABOUT THE SPIRIT – vv. 3, 6

We already looked briefly at **verse 3**, but I want to return there for a moment because it helps us understand the mindset of the disciples. In this verse we see their learning.

A. Their Learning – v. 3

During those times of interaction after the resurrection, Jesus taught the disciples many things including the kingdom of God. That was the heart of His teaching. It is more than just the sovereign rule of God over all the universe as its Creator. That’s the broader understanding. The narrower meaning is that God reigns in the hearts of those who willingly submit to Him. That is His spiritual

rule over us. Jesus preached that His kingdom was not part of this world, and in order to be a part of His kingdom, repentance was required. In **John 3:5-7** we read that to be part of this kingdom, a person must be born again.

That was also the thrust of John the Baptist's teaching as well, as he spoke about the kingdom of heaven and a term he used 33 times in his gospel. Mark and Luke used the term kingdom of God. They are synonymous terms and speak both to the present reality as His kingdom is established in the hearts of believers who now serve Him as King or ruler of their lives but it also speaks of a future hope, something that is yet to come. In the present, it is a spiritual kingdom in the heart of believers. In the future, it is a physical kingdom where believers will live, what we refer to as His millennial reign.

Old Testament prophets like Daniel spoke of the future kingdom where he wrote **“the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 2:44)**

When Christ died on the cross, the hopes of the disciples regarding His kingdom died with it. The resurrection changed all that. Their hopes were now revived. His teaching would have included what it meant for Him to have divine rule in their hearts. That was something He also taught them in His earthly ministry. But He also taught them about the physical kingdom to come that would last forever.

These 40 days and times of teaching were meant for their learning. What we see then in **verse 6** has to do with their logic.

B. Their Logic – v. 6

At times we want to be hard on the disciples thinking they weren't getting the full picture or fully understanding what Jesus was teaching them. Let me just say, that Jesus does not rebuke them for their asking this question. The word **“asked”** means they kept asking Him. It was a legitimate question born out of their logical understanding from what they had also been taught from the Old Testament. **Isaiah 32:15-20**

In Bible class it was explained this way. Picture yourself driving out west approaching the Rocky Mountains. In the front you see a mountain peak and behind it you see a higher peak. From your vantage point it appears that the one is right behind the one in front. What you fail to see is the considerable distance between the two, something you would see if you were looking from the side.

From where the disciples stood, the coming of the promised Holy Spirit meant that Jesus would be ushering in His physical kingdom right away. They didn't see that there would be a lapse in time between the coming of the Holy Spirit and the physical reign of Christ. It makes logical sense for them to ask this question.

Keep in mind that many Jews believed that the Messiah would bring political restoration from Roman oppression. There will be a future time when Christ will reign over the earth, but His intent in coming the first time was to establish His rule in the hearts of people through faith. So their understanding of the literal, earthly kingdom was correct, just not the timing of when it would occur.

The disciples were told to go to Jerusalem and wait for the coming gift of the Holy Spirit. With the news of the coming Holy Spirit, they had a logical question regarding the kingdom of God, which Jesus had been teaching them about. They and asked Him about it. So, it is ok to ask the Lord questions when you need clarification.

Which brings us to our final point in **verses 7-8**. The disciples' witnessing through the Spirit.

III. THE DISCIPLES' WITNESSING THROUGH THE SPIRIT – vv. 7-8

In **verse 7**, we see their preparation for witnessing.

A. Their Preparation For Witnessing – v. 7

It certainly included the time they spent in those 40 days being taught by the Lord. We need to listen well to instruction and seek opportunities to learn.

A couple weeks ago, Pastor Jim sent out an email

offering free helps for sharing the gospel effectively with children. In case you missed the email or lost the email, here's the website information:

KidsEnjoyingJesus.com

There are a lot of tools to help learn how to share the gospel.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association website has a link on learning how to share your faith.

The Navigators ministry. Topics include:

- Training on The Bridge to Life
- One verse evangelism
- Invite friends to read the Bible
- How to prepare your personal testimony
- The Insider: Bringing the kingdom of God into your everyday world
- Good news for a change
- 42 seconds

Some of these are booklets, others are simple instructions to help you learn to share your faith.

Books include:

Becoming a Contagious Christian – Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg (*The Case for Christ/Faith*)
(We did this series a number of years ago and would be glad to teach it again.)

The Master Plan of Evangelism – Robert Coleman

Evangelism Explosion – Dr. James Kennedy

They also have a website that provides training and has some informative articles. One article, in conjunction with a survey done by Lifeway Research Group, noted that they talked with 1,000 Americans and found that 66% were open or very open to talking about faith with friend. Evangelism explosion also has an online class.

Those are just some of the resources. My point being that there is no excuse to learn how to share your faith. The disciples were taught by Jesus.

Their preparation also included, as we saw from **verse 4** that they were to wait for the Holy Spirit. We don't have to wait, because we have the Holy Spirit already.

From Jesus' response and perspective, they didn't need to know about times or dates about when the kingdom of God would be established. What was more important on His agenda was to ensure that they were preparing for the responsibility of faithfully witnessing.

Jesus also mentions an important truth about the timing of when the kingdom of God would happen. God had it all planned out in His sovereignty. It was something He taught back in **Matthew 24:36, 44, 46** **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come...the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.”**

Similarly, Paul wrote in **I Thessalonians 5:1-2a** **“Now, brothers, about the times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.**

Don't get caught up in when the kingdom of God will happen, be faithful witnesses. They were to be prepared. And then Jesus gives them their power to witness.

B. Their Power To Witness – v. 8a

John MacArthur writes **“All the preparation and training that knowledge and experience can bring are useless without the proper might. Power had to accompany truth.”**

We can go to the best schools, get the best training, have the best strategy, but unless we go in the power of the Holy Spirit, it will not be effective. Like the disciples, we need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to go along with teaching, motivation and enthusiasm.

Matthew 10:17-20

J Vernon McGee posts a sobering indictment on the church when he writes: **“Today there are a great many people who want to talk about the times and seasons of His coming, but they don't want to get involved in getting out the Word of God.”**

We don't know how much time we have left either when our life will end, or the Lord's return but we are to witness by the supernatural power of the indwelling Holy Spirit given to us for the purpose of sharing the gospel.

Last week I mentioned that the word power used here is different than the word power used in **Matthew 28**. The Greek word *dunamos* is where we get our English word dynamite. This power is to witness. Witness is the word we have for martyr. It simply means to testify to the facts and truth of what we have seen and heard.

Acts 5:29-32

Tertullian lived at the end of the 2nd century and into the early part of the 3rd century. He was an early Christian author living in Carthage, which was in the Roman province of Africa. He wrote extensively about apologetics, the defense of the Scriptures. He wrote that the blood of the martyrs (witnesses) became the seed of the church.

The faith and witness of many believers brought persecution and the word witness became associated with those who died for their faith. We may not be called to give our life physically as a witness, but we are called to be witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is rightly said that we don't choose to be witnesses, we are witnesses. The only question is whether we are effective. Is our witness good or bad?

I Peter 3:15 "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

Oswald Smith wrote that **"We talk about the second coming. Half the world has never heard of the first."**

You don't have to look very hard or very far to see that our world is in desperate need of the gospel. The Holy Spirit is our power to bear witness of the gospel, but it is His to effectually work in that life to bring conviction and regeneration in the person who

hears the good news and responds by faith.

With that we close with their places to witness.

C. Their Places To Witness – v. 8b

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the world.

William Shakespeare wrote:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,*

I would suggest to you that all the world is a mission field, and we are all witnesses in it.

Begin with those around us in our home, our neighborhood and community. Then our state, and country and then the world. That's the story of Acts.

Hudson Taylor said **"Would that God would make hell so real to us that we cannot rest, heaven so real that we must have men there."**

In 1983 a fifty-year-old tradition was quietly dropped by the U.S. House of Representatives. The tradition involved the annual reading of George Washington's farewell address on the occasion of his birthday. Democratic and Republican leaders decided it was useless to continue to read the lengthy address to a mostly empty chamber. "It's too bad," said GOP aide, "but it's time for this to be consigned to the dustbin."

The Calgary Herald wrote: "In past years, it was almost holy writ that the address must be read. Through war and storm for half a century, a member of each chamber has been chosen to read the address." The newspaper heading declared, "Nobody listens to Washington's farewell address."

We are afraid that something parallel to this is taking place in the Christian church. Fewer and fewer believers are listening to Christ's farewell message. To His disciples Christ gave clear instructions - to go to all nations with the Gospel and there to make disciples.

Dr. Oswald J. Smith remarked **"The light that shines the farthest, will shine the brightest at home."**

We are capable by the power of the Spirit to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the world.