

A Faith That Succeeds

Acts 1:1-14

Introduction

The Book of Acts describes the formation of the church. It also tells us how the Holy Spirit worked in and through the church in its early days. The Gospel of Luke tells us what Jesus did and taught when he began his earthly ministry, but the Book of Acts tells us what Jesus continues to do and teach by the Holy Spirit through his spiritual body, the church.

In Acts Chapter 1, the followers of Jesus take care of some unfinished business while preparing for the Feast of Pentecost. What they said and did gives us a view of their faith in action. How did they develop such a triumphant faith? How did the resurrection impact what they believed about Jesus? Let's take a look at it in Acts Chapter 1.

"The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "**which,**" *He said,* "**you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**" Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "**It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**" Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." (Act 1:1-14 NKJV)

I. They Believed in the Resurrection

The first thing to note as you read this Chapter is how linked the success of the early church is to their faith in the Risen Christ. After His resurrection, Jesus

remained in direct contact with the disciples for 40 days, teaching and explaining and ministering to them. It was apparent that they needed to know some things before they were ready to take the message of the resurrection to their world. During those 40 days, Jesus would periodically appear to believers as convincing proof of His resurrection. It was an excellent period of preparation for the church. They learned and came to understand the meaning and purpose of Christ's coming to earth. They were awed by the words of the angel at the ascension of Christ, who said, "this same Jesus, which you have seen go into heaven, will come back in the same way!" That same anticipation and expectation is at the heart of our faith even today! Our faith relies upon the undeniable, eyewitness reports of those early followers.

According to verse 3, they believed in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. Some may have had doubts at first, but during that forty days, there could be no question that Jesus rose from the dead. And to strengthen their faith, Jesus gave the disciples many infallible and convincing proofs. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus was critically important to the early church. Their witness and spiritual power depended upon it. Their message must be based in reality, or eventually, arguments against their witness would silence them.

Armed with the truth, the church prevailed even when Jewish officials spread the story that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. By their words, their walk, and their mighty works, the believers told their world that Jesus was alive. And they were convincing! The disciples weren't just telling a story; they believed in the resurrection. And they believed in the coming of His kingdom. Before the resurrection, their view of the Kingdom of God was an earthly one. They were excited about a king who would throw off Roman oppression and establish Israel as a nation again. But after the resurrection, they realized that Christ's kingdom was not of this world. It was a spiritual kingdom whose subjects were united in the faith and hope of Jesus Christ.

The disciples also believed in the power of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist had announced that the anointed one would baptize them in Holy Spirit power. It would be an endowment of power that would enable believers to serve Christ even when they faced incredible challenges and difficulties.

Verse 8 explains that their power would come from the Holy Spirit and not from man. Ordinary people were able to do extraordinary things because the Spirit of God was at work in their lives. For the authentic believer, the power of the Holy Spirit is not a luxury; it is an absolute necessity.

The word "witness" is a keyword in the Book of Acts. It is used 29 times as either a verb or a noun. A witness is someone who tells what they have seen or heard. Our English word "martyr" comes from the Greek word translated "witness." Many believers, through the years, have sealed their witness by laying down their lives for their faith in Christ. In principle, it is a decision that each of us must be willing to make. And it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength to make that decision. The early believers clung to the assurance of Jesus' return.

The ascension was a vital part of Christ's ministry. Jesus had promised that when he returned to heaven, he would send the Holy Spirit to guide the church. Once He returned to heaven, Jesus would intercede for us as our High Priest. He would provide all that we need to succeed in our mission. He would be our Advocate before the Father, forgiving us when we confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness. As the Lord of the Church, Jesus provides whatever we need to succeed in our faith and witness.

The Holy Spirit came just as Jesus promised and is here today to encourage and equip us to overcome in any kind of situation. No matter what you encounter, Jesus has promised to be with you and the Holy Spirit is here to assure you of that promise. The blessed hope of the church and the continuing hope of every believer is that one day Jesus will return and validate the witness of all those who have proclaimed the good news and sacrificed for the cause of Christ. Our faith is deeply rooted in the fact and truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection is the basis of our common faith and future hope.

But not only were they completely convinced of the resurrection of Jesus, but they were also committed to each other in faith.

II. They Believed in Each Other

They obeyed the Lord's command and returned to Jerusalem "with great joy." The disciples continued to meet together. They met in an upper room. They met in the temple near Solomon's Colonnade. And they met house to house. The group included men and women, apostles and new converts, people of influence and commoners, as well as Greeks and Romans and Jews. People came from all walks of life and various backgrounds. But the Holy Spirit unified them in faith. The center of their fellowship was the risen Christ. They were devoted to Him. And they came together to worship and adore and magnify their risen savior.

The disciples weren't judgmental or critical of each other. They weren't competitive or selfish. They were committed to searching out what Christ wanted them to do. They set aside titles and privilege and personal recognition to follow the King of Heaven. Their lives became an example of humility expressed in love and service. They gave up honoring themselves so they could honor Christ.

The Bible uses the phrase "with one accord" to refer to the unity the disciples enjoyed. The expression is found six times in the book of Acts. They shared a unity that bound them not only to Christ but to one another. To be a victorious Christian, we must have faith in Jesus, but we must also have confidence in one another.

To these 120 believers, the Lord gave the solemn responsibility of bearing witness to an unbelieving world. And Jesus knew that none of them could do the job alone. The church's success depended upon the commitment of the disciples to each other. That's why I believe in the church, and that's why each of us needs the

church. No one can accomplish the mission of Christ alone! You may not need the church to have faith in Jesus, but you can't accomplish His mission by yourself.

Jesus knew his followers would experience severe persecution in the days ahead. He knew each of the Apostles would lay down their lives for Him. Gone would be the days of seeking personal greatness in the kingdom. The future would require sticking together and working together and praying together. And as they waited and worshipped together, the Holy Spirit prepared them for the work that lay before them.

The disciples were committed to the Risen Christ, and they were committed to each other. But one more ingredient was necessary. They were also committed to prayer.

III. They Believed in Prayer

Prayer played a significant role in the life of the early church. According to verses 15-26, they prayed for guidance whenever making decisions. The disciples prayed for courage to witness. They prayed for healing and miracles to take place. They prayed for the success of the gospel. They prayed about everything. Prayer was, in fact, a regular part of their daily ministry.

- As he was being stoned, Stephen prayed. in Acts 7.
- Peter and John prayed for the lame man to be healed and for Samaritans to receive salvation.
- Cornelius prayed that God would send someone to show them the way of salvation.
- The church prayed for Peter's release from prison.
- At Antioch, they fasted and prayed before sending out Barnabas and Saul.
- In a prayer meeting in Philippi, Lydia gave her heart to Christ.
- Before leaving Ephesus, Paul prayed for the believers there.

Throughout the book of Acts, in almost every chapter, you find someone praying. Someone once said that prayer is the thermostat that regulates the faith of the church. The spiritual climate either goes up or down depending upon how the people pray. John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, wrote, "Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan." In the Book of Acts, you see prayer accomplishing all of these things.

Conclusion

Even though Jesus returned to heaven, those early believers were not without Christ's instruction and guidance. They had faith in the Risen Christ, they had faith in each other, and they had faith that their prayers mattered to God. This assurance came from the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit that overshadowed them each day.

And that same Holy Spirit is right here, right now, giving that same assurance to us. We, too, have a mission for Christ to fulfill. We, too, must take the good news

of God's love and grace to our world. We, too, must be willing to face opposition and criticism for our faith. Our commitment is not to an empty religion. We are committed to a relationship with a person called Jesus Christ. By faith, we believe Jesus is God's Son and our Savior.

If you are a follower of Christ, I urge you to allow the Holy Spirit to equip you with boldness and confidence. And add your "witness" to the witness of so many saints who have gone before us. If you haven't surrendered your life to Christ, today's a good time to do that. Don't let the fear of these uncertain days paralyze you. Put your faith in the resurrected Christ. Don't worry about dying. When you accept Jesus Christ, you receive eternal life! Trade your personal ambitions for the resurrection power of God and the healing touch of Jesus upon your life. Put your faith in the Risen Lord, and He will see to it that you experience an abundance of faith and the hope of eternal life.

A small group of 120 believers turned their world upside down because they believed this. What was their secret? They relied upon the assurance of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Can it be done again today? Can fear be turned to faith? Absolutely. Could the Holy Spirit empower us to turn our world upside down for Christ? I believe He can! All that's required is for us to say YES!