

Reading Acts 1...

In the SAPC reading challenge, we are a few chapters into the book of Acts. There are many significant things that you will encounter in this book. In chapter one, you came across a verse that many have memorized with regard to evangelism: “*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.*” (*Acts 1:8 ESV*). Here, the risen Christ speaks to his disciples about the source of empowerment for their divine mission (cf. Luke 24:47-49). This verse encouraged the early church (and us) that they were not alone in their mission and literally, the power of God Almighty was at work through their witness. However, there is more to this verse than many realize. Let’s consider the context.

First, this verse actually provides a general outline for the whole book of Acts. We see believers being Christ’s witnesses in Jerusalem (chapters 1-7), in Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12), and to the ends of the earth (chapters 13-28). Of course, we are also his witnesses, continuing to spread the gospel message to the ends of the earth until he comes again.

Second, notice that Jesus says this as part of *his response to a question* from his disciples about the kingdom of God (v.6). So, it would be important to ask how verse 8 relates to the kingdom of God. Indeed, the kingdom was very much a part of Jesus’ teaching (*Mk 1:14; Matt 4:17, 23*), even during the days leading up to his ascension (*Acts 1:3*)—but *how is it related?*

The disciples’ question betrays an assumption that now that Jesus was resurrected, he would ‘restore the kingdom to Israel’ as political nation, in an overtly military fashion (remember Jesus’ words to Pilate [*John 18:36*]). However, Jesus redirects their thinking with his response. Rather than giving credence to their expectations, he says that the Father fixes the times and seasons of fulfillment, but that they will receive power to be his witnesses throughout the world. Hence, *the ‘restoration’ of the kingdom would take place through gospel proclamation and making disciples of all nations*. The ‘holy nation’ would include believing Jews and Gentiles from *many* nations. Contrary to worldly expectations, Christ’s kingdom would grow not by military might, but by spirit-filled witness, which looks insignificant to the world, but in fact, is the power of God. This would seem to fit with Jesus’ parables about the kingdom which reveal a growth dynamic which only the eye of faith can truly perceive (i.e. seen by those who are born again and belong to the kingdom).

We are also his witnesses by the power of the Spirit. As we proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations, we are involved in God’s work of ‘restoring the kingdom.’ This is what we are also to pray for—“your kingdom come” (*Matt 6:10*). Let us give ourselves fully to this work of God, knowing that our labor is not in vain (*1 Cor 15:58*).

Keep reading!

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