

## Acts 1:8

**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**

The New Testament book that we call 'Acts' is the second part of a longer work

- Luke, the writer of Acts, has a first book, the gospel that bears his name
- This second book is really the sequel to that work
- In his gospel, Luke reminds us that the ministry of Jesus was in the Spirit's power
- Now, in Acts, Luke reminds us that the ministry of Jesus continues
- First through the apostles who are appointed as witnesses
- And then through a wider community of Christians that we call the church

The beginning of Jesus' public ministry is marked out by his baptism in the Jordan, when

- The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove (Luke 3:22)
- In the first book, the gospel, Luke has recorded all that Jesus began to do and teach
- But here in the second book, Acts, he continues the account
- In the first part Jesus ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit
- In the second part Jesus continues to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit
- Not in the body which the disciples recognised but through a new body
- The community of Christians, the church

The ministry of Jesus did not end at his ascension into glory

- His ministry of prayer and preparation for the eternal kingdom continue
- But also his earthly ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God continues
- By the power of the Holy Spirit and through the apostles
- And those who are similarly received into the kingdom of God
- With the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- Jesus himself reminded the disciples
- John baptised with water but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit

I suppose that I had better preface what I have to say with the disclaimer

- 'not everyone will agree with me'
- but, that said, it seems to me that the expression 'baptism in the Holy Spirit'
- has been wrongly used in the church, more especially in recent years

Clearly, 'baptism in the Spirit' is a biblical expression

- John the Baptist contrasted his water baptism
- With that of the one who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire

The main historical fulfilment of the prediction of the baptism of the Holy Spirit

- Was the events of the day of Pentecost
- With the sound like the blowing of a violent wind and the tongues of fire (Acts 2:2,3)
- Here the apostles were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak in other languages
- Chiefly, so it appears to me, to proclaim the good news of Jesus to all (Acts 2:6)
- Later, while Peter was speaking to Cornelius (Acts 10:44)
- the Holy Spirit fell on all that heard the message and Jewish believers were amazed
- because the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the Gentiles

The interesting words that Jesus spoke at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:39)

- Suggest that baptism in the Spirit is something that happens to all believers
- Because they receive the Holy Spirit – normally at conversion
- For it is only by the Spirit that the believer can say, 'Jesus is Lord'

Two questions follow from this:

- Should we expect mighty outpourings of the Spirit in our age?
- Should we expect repeated times of blessing as individual Christians?

The answer to these questions is less than straightforward so you need to bear with me

- Should we expect mighty outpourings of the Spirit in our age?
- I believe that we should, but I don't think we should call these 'baptism in the Spirit'
- Should we expect repeated times of blessing as individual Christians/
- I believe that we should, but I don't think we should call these 'baptism in the Spirit'

The words of Jesus, that the baptism of the Holy Spirit would take place 'in a few days'

- Suggest to me that Jesus was teaching a specific event and not a process
- Only one other event in the New Testament is described as baptism of the Holy Spirit
- And that was the coming of the Spirit upon the first Gentile believers
- Of this, Peter observes, that the Holy Spirit came on them (the Gentiles)
- As the Holy Spirit had fallen upon us (Jewish believers) at the beginning (Acts 11:15)
- 'at the beginning' is undoubtedly a reference to the day of Pentecost

In the New Testament letters there is no reference to repeated baptism of the Holy Spirit

- Paul tells his most obviously charismatic congregation (Corinth)
- That they were baptised in the one Spirit into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13)
- Baptism is inevitably linked with washing, washing is linked with cleansing
- Cleansing is linked with the blood of Christ, this is linked with saving faith
- And, I am contending, that saving faith (conversion) is linked
- With the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- Now, the \$64,000 question of this interpretation of scripture must always be
- Is it consistent with the rest of scripture, for scripture is its own best interpreter

Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. This is the one who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

I John 5:4-8

In the New Testament, the assumption is that every believer has the Holy Spirit

- The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is the deposit
- As the Authorised Version rendered it, 'the earnest', the down payment (Eph. 1:14)
- That an even greater inheritance was to come

There are plenty of places in the New Testament where Christians are commanded:

- To walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16)
- To be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)
- Walking by the Spirit is clearly a continuous process
- Being filled with the Spirit may also be a continuous process
- But it appears to me that the believer is baptised in the Spirit at conversion

One issue that remains unresolved is the 'baptism of fire'

- In colloquial English this means to have a tough start in a particular activity
- Some people imply that the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- And the baptism of fire are one and the same, but I do not share that view
- Baptism of fire is a clear contrast with the baptism in water
- If the baptism of water and the Spirit come at conversion (justification)
- The baptism of fire seems likely to refer to something else
- Something like ultimate saving power which, perhaps at one and the same time
- Is also the power of judgment – perhaps, we had best think of it as the refiner's fire
- Bringing holiness to the life of the believer - but judgment on the sinner

Just as the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to equip him for his public ministry

- Now Luke anticipates that the same Spirit will come upon the church
- And this sets the stage for all that will follow in Acts
- For the Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus
- And witness is a prominent theme in Acts
- The word appearing 39 times in its various forms
- A substantial proportion of Acts is given over to the verbal witness of the apostles
- They gave testimony – this was a mandate that they had received from Jesus

Rather like the interlude in the gospel where the Jesus is speaking about his betrayal

- And the disciples are arguing about who will be the greatest (Luke 9:46)
- Here in Acts, Jesus is speaking about the worldwide kingdom of God
- And the disciples, perhaps with an eye on their place, are arguing about Israel
- It portrays a common temptation – but gives a spiritual remedy

The great command of Jesus is to bear witness

- What is, in effect, the whole theme of Acts
- Is explicitly set out
- Then, as now, there are always people who try to dodge that
- By taking great interest in something else
- For the disciples, it is the restoration of the kingdom of Israel
- For us, it can so easily be all manner of things
- Anything that stops us from fulfilling the command to witness

The command to witness comes directly from the Lord Jesus Christ himself

- Jesus' last word here in Acts is directly parallel with his last word in Matthew
- It is therefore final and conclusive and lays an obligation on every believer
- It is command, but as is often the case, it comes as a gift with a promise

In Matthew the command to disciple all nations (Matthew 28:19-20)

- Comes with the promise of the presence of Jesus, even to the end of the age
- This is therefore the very essence of what it means to be the Christian community
- The Christian communities that are dead or dying
- Are not those who are numerically small, but those that do not bear witness
- The missionary church responds obediently to the commission of Jesus
- In Acts we see clearly that the witness of the church is centred on one message
- It is the message of Jesus – the content of the witness is therefore:

## I ITS PERSON

The Apostle Paul cried out, ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’ (1 Cor. 9:16)

- There are people around who seem to have made the message
- A form of spiritual political correctness
- Some time ago, the Methodist Church published a leaflet
- Describing what the Methodist Church was all about
- It was beautifully produced and highly deceptive
- Many people that I asked told me that it was a lovely leaflet
- And one that they would be pleased to pass on to others
- But it had so many weaknesses that I felt compelled to write to London
- And, in fairness, received a very gracious reply from the person to whom I wrote
- The leaflet was very attractive – all that it said was pretty good
- It told me that I would be welcome in the Methodist Church whoever I am
- It told me that church is not an escape from real life
- It told me that I could get married in a Methodist Church or have my baby baptised
- It told me that the Methodist Church was the fourth largest church in Britain
- It told me that I was invited to take a journey of faith – all good stuff
- On glossy paper and in full colour – just what the church needed

The letter that I rather reluctantly wrote commended the format, the presentation, length

- And continued, here are some of the things I would like to find but cannot
- The divinity of Jesus and the idea of Jesus as ‘God with us’
- That the death of Jesus on the cross was for a purpose
- That Jesus rose again and is alive
- That the person and power of the Holy Spirit can be with us today

The essential gospel data is the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus

- Coupled with the promise that he will come again as king and judge

The apostles will now be commissioned to a glorious and honourable work

- They are to be Jesus’ witnesses
- They are to proclaim him the risen and eternal king
- They are to proclaim the truths to the world that will set up his kingdom
- They are to openly and solemnly preach his gospel to the whole world
- On the assumption that we do not have every detail of this event in the text
- I would say that the noise of knocking knees would have been quite audible
- But then comes the promise ‘wait for the gift my Father promised’
- In a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit ... you will receive power

## ITS POWER

In the New Testament there are two words that are often translated 'power'

- One is *exousia* from which we get the English word 'executive' power
- Another is *dunamis* from which we get the English word 'dynamite' power
- Now its really quite important to know whether Jesus is sending them with authority
- Or with dynamite power – and the answer is that he sending them with dynamite
- And as the pages of Acts unfold that is exactly what we find
- For it is by the 'dynamite' power of the Spirit
- Peter and John are empowered to heal the cripple by God (Acts 3:12)
- By what power and in what name did they do it – the name of Jesus (Acts 4:7)
- Jesus was accredited by God by acts of power which God did through him (Acts 2:22)
- Now Luke will tell what Jesus continues to do and to teach, through his church
- And the same word 10 times in Acts to describe the continuing work of the gospel

Jesus is telling the disciples so that they know they will receive spiritual power

- To be his witnesses
- Their testimony will be confirmed not with an oath but with doing the work of Jesus
- Their spiritual power is not power of their own but power from the Holy Spirit
- And they will not receive this power in vain
- For they will be witness to Jesus and to his glory
- The ministry of Jesus was enabled by the power of the Spirit
- The good news is that the power of the same Spirit is given to believers today
- The other side of the coin is that without the Spirit we can do nothing
- This is a great challenge to people like me who like new ideas and hard work
- To be fair, there is nothing wrong with new ideas and hard work
- But these are as nothing without the power of the Spirit

Jesus promised that their power for the work to which he commission them would be enough

- They did not have strength of their own to do it
- They did not have enough wisdom or courage
- Their relatively recent track record when Jesus was arrested and crucified showed that
- But a new Spirit and a new power was going to come upon them
- Giving them power to preach the gospel and to prove it out of the scriptures
- Jesus does not leave any of his servants unequipped for the task
- He gives us the word of the scriptures and the power of the Spirit
- And calls us to bear witness to him in word and in deed
- So that the church in every age needs powerful preachers
- And lives that bear testimony to the powerful saving work of Jesus

The promise of Jesus is that Holy Spirit will descend upon the apostles with power

- By this power they will be able to bear witness to Jesus
- At Pentecost, Peter's apostolic preaching begins with these words, 'Jesus of Nazareth'
- His preaching and the essential apostolic message may be simply summarised
- Jesus was the promised Saviour, the death of Jesus was part of God's plan
- God raised him for the dead as promised, the resurrection of Jesus was witnessed
- Jesus is glorified now and for ever, all must repent and believe in him

The apostles bear witness to Jesus, they are his witnesses  
The apostles do not do this in their own strength but in the power of the Spirit  
But having seen;  
ITS PERSON and  
ITS POWER

We must notice also:

### III ITS PROGRAMME

To many of us the programme of the apostolic mission is familiar enough

- It begins at Jerusalem, moves on to Judea and Samaria
- And extends to the ends of the earth

In a sense, 'Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth' is a table of contents

- Acts chapters 2-7: The church's witness at Jerusalem
- Acts chapters 8-12: The church's witness in Judea and Samaria
- Acts chapters 13-28: The church's witness to the ends of the earth (well Rome)
- The implication being that once the gospel is preached in Rome the work will go on

It's easy to pass over all of this in a matter of fact kind of way

- Because we are familiar with the Bible account
- And by our reckoning, anywhere is easier to be a witness than our patch
- That has certainly been the response of the locals in all my circuits

But think for a moment about Jerusalem

- This is the very same city where Jesus was crucified
- Not much more than seven weeks have passed and now the apostles must preach there
- Jerusalem is home to the religious hostility of Pharisees and Sadducees
- It is the centre of organised religion that has missed the good news of Jesus
- It is also under foreign occupation
- A centre for machinations, power games, double-dealing, political expediency
- If ever a place needed the gospel, it sounds like Jerusalem

Or think for a moment about Judea

- This province, a distant corner of Rome's great empire had once been a kingdom
- People look back to their own greatness and royal realm, especially under King David
- How easy it has been for religious revival to be confused with political aspirations
- Even the Lord Jesus himself had to take great care the gospel was not misunderstood

Or think for a moment about Samaria – and its people, the Samaritans

- Judea's northern neighbour, a rather pathetic remnant of what had been Israel
- Despised by the Judeans (or Jews) because of her corruptions of faith
- That had heralded her doom at the hands of the Assyrian army
- The apostles must now preach here, even though they had not done so with Jesus

As for the ends of the earth, Rome would have seemed the ends of the earth to them

- The word must spread, its person: Jesus; by the power of the spirit; to all the earth