

West Valley Church
11/27/11

Engage The Word
Part Six: Acts 1:1-11

Today we are on day 35 of *Engage the Word*—our 40-day journey together through the Bible, reading the same passages together each day. We began with excerpts from the first book—Genesis and we'll finish by reading from the last one—Revelation. Would you take out your “Engage the Word” books, and turn to the sermon outline page for today. If you don't have a book, you can use the sermon notes in your worship folder, or use your iPad or smart phone and go to our website on the sermons page and download it from there. Information on accessing our wireless network is in your worship folder. If you don't have a book, on your way out go to *Guest Services* right outside these doors and they will be happy to give you one. Many of you have begun talking about today's reading in our Community Groups this morning, and if you haven't been to those, I encourage you to join us next Sunday morning at 8:45a for some great discussion.

Before we look at our passage for today, you might be wondering how we got this Bible; how did it come to be what it is? Why did the New Testament end up with these books in it and not others?

There was criteria that the early church used to decide which books were authentic and which were not. For a book to be accepted into the New Testament canon, it had to pass these four tests:

Apostolicity. This means that it had to either be written by an apostle, or that the writer was writing down what was being dictated to him by an apostle. In other words, it had to be an eye-witness account. Second was ***Content***. This test meant that the content had to have a high spiritual character, and consistent with the references from the Old Testament and its context. The third test was ***Universality***. This meant that it had to be recognized by the New Testament church as a whole as being inspired. The last test was the ***Inspiration*** test. In other words, is it divinely inspired when compared to other writings considered to be inspired (in other words, the Old Testament).

The books of the New Testament weren't just random or fictional. There was a system for selection from the beginning, and each one had to pass all four tests. Of course, our faith tells us that the New Testament is more than man-made accounts or stories. The source comes from God Himself. The Bible says that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16) And the Apostle Peter explains the way God

worked in Scripture when he wrote, “The main thing to keep in mind here is that no prophecy of Scripture (or declaration or writing) is a matter of private opinion. And why? Because it's not something concocted in the human heart. Prophecy resulted when the Holy Spirit prompted men and women to speak God's Word.” (2 Peter 1:20-21) The ultimate source of the Bible is God Himself!

Speaking of what the Bible says, let's look at the passage for today that you heard my son, Ryan, read to us.

The book of Acts is really part two in a series, or the “sequel” if you will, to the Gospel of Luke. Luke wrote both the Gospel and the book of Acts, so Luke is Part One and Acts is Part Two. The beginning of Chapter one is kind of transition between the two. By the way, here's some trivia for you: the book of Luke and the book of Acts are the two longest books of the New Testament, and together they form about one-fourth of the entire New Testament. Those books might have been even longer than that, but they were originally written on a papyrus roll, and a single roll was not more than 35 feet in length. Altogether Luke and Acts made up about 64 feet of papyrus! Luke might have kept on writing if he had longer paper, and of course there was always more that could be said about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but he had to stop.

This first chapter covers the forty days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension—after he rose from the dead and before he ascended into heaven. The topic of Jesus' conversations during those forty days was the Kingdom of God. The phrase “kingdom of God” means the rule or reign of God in the hearts of men and women. Jesus was therefore talking to them about the Holy Spirit. The disciples were not adequately equipped for what they were about to do, so they needed the Holy Spirit. It's worth making note of something here: while Acts records the *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit, this was not the *beginning* of the Holy Spirit—he has always existed; he is God. You can see him at work in different ways in the Old Testament. The disciples were about to become acquainted with the Holy Spirit—even though they hadn't known him before, he always existed. They just discovered him. Just like atomic power has always existed; we just recently discovered and tapped into it.

But the disciples misunderstood what the Kingdom of God was about. They, along with most Jews, were waiting for the chance to become a political power. They thought that, now that Jesus had risen from the dead, they would have an eternal political Kingdom that would rule the world. You can understand why they'd feel that way—they'd been exiled and scattered and without their own nation for centuries. So they asked Jesus if that time had finally come. Well, in answer, first Jesus reminded them that the timing of everything was the Father's secret

(Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32). Not only would the disciples not know those dates and times, but somehow even Jesus didn't know those things. Jesus uses two words: dates and times. In the original language, the first word is "chronos" and means a particular time of day or date on the calendar. The second word, "times," is the Greek word "kairos" which means "seasons." In other words, there is a certain amount of time that has to elapse before Jesus returns and God sets up his Kingdom, but there are also certain events that have to happen. So he will return at a certain date after certain events take place, and only God knows. So let me just say it: yes it's good to pay attention to the *events*—the kairos—but it is absolutely wrong—almost blasphemous—to try and pick a *date*—chronos. If someone picks a date they say Jesus is coming back, and Jesus said even he didn't know those dates, well then, who do they think they are?!

Then Jesus says, "Look, all those things aren't important right now. Here's what's really important: you are going to receive the Holy Spirit so that you can be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Since that's the most important thing, let's look at it, starting with

1. The ***Mission***

I know you understand that anything Jesus told his disciples in Scripture applies to those today who call themselves Christian, because any Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ. So everything he told the disciples, he is telling us. And Jesus very clearly gives them, and us, the mission. The mission is to be his witnesses. It's the same thing that Jesus commissioned us to do from Matthew 28:18-20: "Jesus came and told His disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20, nlt)

Anyone who is a believer in Jesus is to be a witness for him. Now, "witnessing" for Jesus means certain things, and does not mean certain other things. I think we've all got stories of people who were "witnessing" in very obnoxious, judgmental, and condescending ways. From shouting on a street corner to passive-aggressive condemnations, we've all gotten a bad taste in our mouths from those experiences. So when Jesus says *we* are to be witnesses, let me give you an example of what he *doesn't* mean. I want to show you a bad example, so don't think I'm recommending this:

Play video

That sounds like too many people I've known over the years. What are some bad

things you picked up from that?

So what did Jesus mean when he told us to be witnesses? A witness is a few things. For instance, a witness is a person who says “I know this is true.” It’s just like in a court of law—a witness is expected to simply tell the truth of what they know. That’s what Christians are supposed to do, too. Not preach at people or debate with people, but simply tell what they know to be true.

A real witness is also a person who doesn’t just say it, but does it. Their deeds back it up. If you were with us last week you remember that Jesus said our lives shine the light by our good deeds or actions; that our lives should be so kind and caring that others are attracted to that.

In the Greek language, the word for “witness” is also the word for “martyr” - someone who dies for their faith. Isn’t that encouraging? That’s a skill you can only use once. Actually, what it means is that a witness is someone who is totally committed to Jesus and loyal to him, no matter what the cost. Are you committed to Jesus no matter the cost? Are you willing to tell others the truth of what you know, and demonstrate it by your good deeds? Do you love him more than your own life? He’s given us the mission to be his witnesses.

Then Jesus gives us

2. The *Means*

Jesus knew that we couldn’t carry this out on our own; that we would need his help. So he gave us the Holy Spirit. In fact, that’s a primary purpose of the Holy Spirit—to give us the power to be his witnesses. “Jesus said, ‘John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking Him, ‘Lord, has the time come for You to free Israel and restore our kingdom?’ He replied, ‘The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 1:5-8, nlt)

Now, there were two different Greek words that were used for “power.” One was “dynamis” which means “explosive power.” Jesus sometimes used that word when he was talking about the Spirit, but that’s not the word Jesus used here. In describing the power we receive from the Holy Spirit, he used the word “exousia,” which means “authority.” In other words, Jesus, the highest power and authority in the universe gave us the power and authority, by the Holy Spirit in us, to be witnesses for him. He has given us the clearance and the power to tell others. He’s given us the outward ability to express the inward power he’s given us. Acts 1:8 is

the key verse of all of Acts! In it we are told what *the power and the program of the church should be*. *The power is the Holy Spirit, and the program is to share the Good News of God's love in our words and our actions to the world*. Too often, instead of the power and program, the church has become the problem. Instead of using the commissioning power of the Holy Spirit to show the world that God loves them, all we do is contemplate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel. We sit around talking about how good we've got it at Bible study and Sunday school class ad nauseam. At best we *ignore* the world around us, and at worst we *judge* the world around us.

In the Church of the Nazarene, the filling of the Holy Spirit is important to us. We talk a lot about it and teach it and preach it and we pray for it and try to practice it. But for a person to claim to be filled with the Spirit, and at the same time have no demonstrable concern for those who don't know Jesus, is to deny their very belief. When the Holy Spirit fills the human heart with his power and presence, that heart has the urge to carry out Christ's command. (Beacon Bible, "Acts," page 262). This is why we were given the Holy Spirit—God's own presence! And the Great Commission cannot be carried out without the power of the Spirit!

So we are given our mission and the means. Next Jesus describes what will happen *when* we do it:

3. The ***Results***

Jesus described the results of our witnessing to be like ripples on the water. He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8, nlt)

Jesus is describing geographic concentric circles, starting with where they were: Jerusalem, then beyond where they were to Judea and Samaria, and then beyond that to the ends of the earth.

Now before we get into what that means for us, the rest of the book of Acts shows exactly that happening! ***Chapters 1-7*** is the story of the disciples ***witnessing in Jerusalem***, then ***chapters 8-12*** is the story of their ***witnessing in Judea and Samaria***, and then ***chapters 13-28*** is the story of ***witnessing to the rest of the Gentile world!***

So what does that mean for us as individuals and for us as a church? It means for you, your Jerusalem is in your home and neighborhood, in the place you spend your time each day whether work or school. Just so you know, *I* keep trying to witness to the people in *my* office, but it's still not working...But that's your Jerusalem.

Your Judea and Samaria is the people outside your comfort zone. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews. So for you, it's those you have an aversion to. That always-angry person at work? That person who's always a downer? That family of a different ethnicity down the street? Yes. All those in your Jerusalem, and your Judea and Samaria, are people you need to demonstrate God's love to in your words and actions, and at least invite them to the place where you meet God each week—the church.

And beyond that, the ends of the earth for you is what you can do through your church. Through getting involved in your church and the things we are doing to reach our community. Also by giving financially to support your church. Besides supporting the work here to reach our community, you are giving to support Pastor Luis and the work in Wapato, to support our partner ministries like Union Gospel Mission, Love Inc. and Prime Time, and you are giving to support the work of world missions all around the world through missionaries, through compassionate relief to areas of global disaster, and through the Jesus Film being shown all around the world. Go out into the foyer and take a good look at the missions wall if you haven't lately; it shows the ways we as a church are at work! Our church has also sent out work and witness trips to world areas to do good works, and we will do that again. You can get involved by attending one of those trips the next time they are planned.

We are to be witnesses here first, beyond here, and from here out into the world. How do we know if we are doing what we are supposed to be doing as a church? We'll know we are doing it when the church is growing and people are coming into friendship and relationship with Jesus. That was the proof in Acts. When the disciples began to witness in Jerusalem—where they lived—many, many people became Christians: “Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.” (Acts 2:41, nlt)

That's the gauge. If a church is not seeing people putting their faith in Jesus and becoming a part of God's community, the church, then the church is not doing its job.

So that leaves us with

4. The Call

This is the call that is given to everyone who claims the name of Christ; who says they are a Christian. Are you witnessing? Are you answering the call? Think carefully about this and weigh your life, your actions, against what you are hearing. Do you call yourself a Christian? Then you are called to witness to who Jesus is, by your words and your life. You are called to walk and live in the power of the Holy Spirit. You have been given a mission of supreme, eternal importance,

authorized and empowered by the highest authority and power there is. Are you a witness?

I was a Junior in high school when I accepted Christ. I didn't grow up in the church and if you knew me you before that would very easily say that I wasn't a Christian. But then I got saved. I started a lunch time Bible study at school and another friend of mine who was a Christian and I started a prayer group on the football team. We'd pray before the games, and post Scriptures on the motivation board in the team room.

On the football team there were girls who volunteered to help out—they'd help out with towels and water bottles; coach called them "managerettes." One of those girls had been arrested. She was working in a massage parlor when it was raided. She'd been released on bail. You see, she had been emancipated by her parents and was now working for her uncle who owned many of the massage parlors and adult stores in town.

My friend and I visited her to see how she was doing and to tell her how much Jesus loves her. Needless to say, she had a hard time believing that, and she had a hard time trusting us. We continued to be friends with her, taking her out to coffee, to dinner, and just visiting with her. Finally, she said she would come to church with us.

We arrived at her apartment Sunday morning to pick her up for church. Her apartment appeared to have been hosting a party the night before; there were several people passed out, including her. She finally answered the door, remembered her promise, and got ready to go to church with us. She put on her best clothes—a blouse and short skirt, fishnet stockings, black high heels and a rabbit fur coat.

We were so happy that she wanted to go to church with us, and we thought for sure everyone else would see this poor girl and be happy for her too.

I learned a lesson that morning in church. It wasn't a good one, either. It took me a long time to unlearn it. When we walked in, I couldn't believe the ugly looks we got. The stares from people made it clear: "What are you doing bringing someone like that in here?" "This is a sacred place—a girl dressed like that doesn't belong here!" The lesson I learned was that church was not a safe place to invite sinners to attend. Sinners weren't welcome there.

Here I was, excited and witnessing to people about the God who saved me. Until I brought those I was witnessing to into church. Apparently I wasn't supposed to do that.

Was that church carrying out its mission? Not in that instance, it wasn't! How

would that girl have felt if she came into this church? How would you have looked at her?

Friend, if you are here, and you are not a believer in Jesus, you are safe here! You are welcome here! You are accepted and honored here. We are honored that you would choose to be with us. And if someone here doesn't treat you that way, I want you to tell me about it. Because we are a church who has a mission, who have been given the Holy Spirit so we can freely tell you about Jesus, and we will back it up with our deeds. And we will do so here on this corner, in this community, in this valley, and through this church around the world. That is our mission and our means. Stick around and see that great things are going on because we have answered the call. Church, I'm talking about you; about us. Let's answer the call.

Pray