

Making a World of Difference

Acts 1:8

Introduction

Most of us never think of ourselves as making a world of difference in anything. We may understand that we impact those around us, family, friends, acquaintances but we stop short of taking hold of the vision that God has for our lives as missionaries. Personalizing Acts 1:8 is where we can begin to comprehend how God wants to work through us.

This powerful directive needs context to fully grasp its impact. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ had not long before died, rose again, and appeared to His followers. There must of have been great angst about the future of Christianity as they understood it— as there were many uncertainties. Along with the uncertainties, there was obviously a passion to spread the good news of salvation but how to do it was unclear. Through Acts, we are given the history of the beginnings of the church, as well as the evangelistic efforts in the form of missionary outreach. The theme of this letter is summarized in the words of Acts 1:8:

“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.”

It is a massive task laid out for us by Jesus, but we know that we can accomplish great things through Christ (Philippians 4:13) and His provision is evident throughout Scripture (Psalm 105:4-5). As a believer in Jesus Christ, you have the responsibility to make a world of difference for His sake. Using the focal passage (Acts 1:8), we find three elements of this directive: the Power, the Purpose, and the Places.

The Power

Power can be described as might, force, or strength. *Question: What are some examples of great power?* There is the power of nature, political power, willpower, the power of the human mind, as well as power created through energy. But what is the power that Jesus is speaking of in Acts 1:8? We are often so caught up in man’s understanding of power that we miss the great strength that God has given us through the Holy Spirit. To illustrate this, I use the example of my youngest child at the age of 4. We were driving on the interstate, just the two of us, and it was a very sunny day. As is common with little ones, she was looking at all the fluffy clouds and telling me the figures that she could make out of them. She saw rabbits, elephants, and puppies within the clouds. Soon we drove by the common sight of the John Amos Power Plant with its towering stacks puffing out cloud-like shapes and her comment to me was “...and that is where all the clouds come from.” Trying not to laugh, it was turned into a teachable moment of how God made the clouds but when I thought about it, adults are often that naive. We look at the results of God’s gifts of wisdom, knowledge, strength, and material provision and assume that the real power is man-made. *Question: What are some areas that we often fail to acknowledge the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives?*

As God’s witnesses, the Holy Spirit was given to us to provide all we need to fulfill the directive given of reaching the world for Jesus. It was imperative that these early believers understood the dependence they must have on the “gift my Father promised” in Acts 1:4. *Question: How important is prayer in your church and personal life?* In studying the book of Acts, there are so many powerful events. Notice the presence of prayer in the descriptions of the accounts (Acts 2:24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 4:31). Great things happen when God’s people go to Him in prayer. *Question: What are some common excuses as to why our churches (or we personally) are not reaching the lost?* Perhaps, we are not evangelizing the lost because we haven’t included God in our plans through communion with Him. We are not plugged into the true power source but rather relying on human abilities, plans, and programs. Jesus explicitly shows us that to be an Acts 1:8 Church, we must understand that the Holy Spirit is our source of power. Make a commitment to pray for the missions work in your own church and efforts around the state. Only through prayer relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, will we have the results that please God.

Ideas for relying on the Power of God:

*As a church, adopt a church plant as a point of regular congregational prayer. Lift up financial needs as well as spiritual needs.

*Contact your Associational Missionary for specific prayer requests in your association and stay in contact for regular updates on any progress.

The Purpose

We all need purpose. In the very beginning, Adam was given a purpose to care for the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). Our world is full of people searching for why they are here, a reason to live, a cause to hold on to. *Question: What are the evidences of people in our society searching for purpose?* We were created ultimately to have a relationship with God. Through the Fall and the entrance of sin into the world, that perfect relationship was corrupted yet the desire for that relationship remains. Because of God's grace and mercy he provided a way to have peace with Him through His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:15-16). As people get farther and farther away from God's original plan, they turn to God less and less. As an Acts 1:8 church, we are given both an individual and corporate purpose that ultimately glorifies God. We are to be witnesses for Jesus.

To witness something is to give or afford evidence of. So, we are to give evidence of what Jesus has done in our lives. First, it requires that Jesus has indeed made a difference in our lives. We must begin with a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). Once we have made Christ the Ruler of our lives, we are to let other people know about this life-changing relationship. *Question: What are some of the barriers to Christians sharing their faith?* Whatever the barrier might be, God has given us a way to overcome it (2Tim 1:7). I am so thankful for the people in my life that who fulfilled their purpose of evangelizing. If they had not, I might have never come to a saving relationship with Jesus. I can think of my parents and their faithfulness to the Word in our home, the many Sunday School teachers that set aside other tasks and made their class a priority, and the faithful churches that I have been a part of that continued to point me in the right direction. *Question: Who are the people in your life that made evangelization a priority?* There is nothing more important than your relationship with God and fulfillment of your God-given purpose of evangelization. We talk a lot about how important missions is, but far less of going to our neighbors, friends, co-workers, and family and confronting them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must let them know of His love for them, and His desire to have a relationship with them (2Peter 3:9). Take hold of your purpose Christian, and start making a difference for the kingdom.

Ideas for fulfilling The Purpose:

*As a family, go door-to-door in your neighborhood and hand out invitations to your church, or a special event. Always make sure the materials have a clear outline of the gospel.

*In your day-to-day activities, ask service personnel (cashiers, waitresses, sales clerks, etc) and co-workers if you can pray for them—or with them.

*Always be ready to give a 2-minute testimony of what God has done in your life.

The Places

“I can’t go to Africa!” When missions is discussed, this can often be the response. No, we can’t all be international missionaries, but our impact is to be world-wide. The opportunities for mission work that we are afforded in this country are overwhelming. In looking at just our Jerusalem and Judea, there are numerous opportunities to get involved in God’s work. In most every Southern Baptist church across West Virginia, we have opportunities locally for outreach and evangelism. Are you involved? There is Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, summer camps, and more available in our churches. These are very practical ways to get involved in a local effort that directly impacts your church and community. *Question: What types of opportunities are there in your church to get involved in local missions?* A wonderful event that our women’s group hosts each year is a free clothing give-away. It is a tangible way that we can assist families in our community in meeting a basic need. The approximately 500 people that are reached through this effort have the opportunity to hear about the love of Jesus and take home a generous amount of clothing for their families. On top of helping the people that participate, we have so many clothes left over that we are able to greatly assist other ministries in the area that need clothing by donating the remainder. Our own church family is greatly blessed in this effort.

Missions education is instrumental in sharing the vision that Jesus gave to go into all the world preaching the gospel. From the smallest of babies to the senior adults, our churches must educate the people about our responsibilities to go, give, and teach. There is no greater peace than accepting Christ but I choose to live out and practice my faith as a Southern Baptist. I believe that as a body of believers cooperating together, Southern Baptists are most effective in carrying the message of Jesus to the world. *Question: What is the Cooperative Program (CP) and what is the role it plays in sending the message of Jesus all over the world? Specifically, what role does the CP play in state missions?*

It isn’t just those individuals that “go” that make a difference, but also those that give. Let’s face it, it takes financial resources to keep mission efforts going. CP dollars are those pooled monies that are used to help fund our state church plants and other missions endeavors. In fulfilling the requirements of an Acts 1:8 church, we must develop faithful givers to reach the boundaries of our evangelization efforts. *Question: Do our churches unashamedly encourage faithful giving to further the kingdom?* It is an incredible task to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, but through the cooperative efforts of his people, empowered by the Holy Spirit, the results are certain.

Ideas for exploring The Places:

*Contact the State Office and/or your Associational Office for specific projects that you as an individual or church can be involved in for financial support, prayer support, and people support.

*Make giving regular tithes as well as giving to special missions offerings a priority in your family and church.

*Because of easy access to state missions projects, it is easy to involve the entire family as well as church families in the efforts. Get involved.

Conclusion

The power, purpose, and places of evangelism are evident in the few words of Acts 1:8. We can make a world of difference starting right here in West Virginia. Whatever barriers are present in keeping you from being involved in some aspect of missions, whether going, giving, or teaching, they can be overcome by the power of God and His provision. When He calls us to a purpose, then He fully equips us to carry it out. Now is the time to seize the moment and join the great missions effort that is right here in West Virginia. Give generously, work diligently, and pray unceasingly for God’s purposes to be carried out and people all around us to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. May God work freely through us and may we be found faithful in the call He has extended.

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