

FROM RESURRECTION TO PENTECOST

Acts 1

Dr. George O. Wood

I wanted this time to be a time of sharing of my heart with you and a time when we could sort of sit quietly and hear God's Word. I wanted to come to this time, too, without the benefit of a pre-prepared manuscript or notes. Not that there's anything wrong with that. I use that all the time because I need it to refresh my memory. But there are sometimes things that can happen when we spontaneously look at the Word, the Holy Spirit may impart on a specific occasion something that He wants said that I could not have pre-anticipated in teaching preparation. I have the luxury and advantage, in my own personal life, of having gone through the Book of Acts many times, and in fact, written a textbook on it. So if I don't have the information together by now on Acts, I'm in trouble. I'd like to go on the basis of having a backlog of information and let the Holy Spirit perhaps draw it to bear on our own lives at this present moment.

There's a pattern, also, for speaking from a sitting position. I once saw it very clearly when I was trying to memorize the Beatitudes. I was doing this sermon on some of the action and the words of the Lord. I was attempting to really get down the Beatitudes, and I was pacing back and forth and shouting at the top of my lungs, like I thought Jesus would have done with the crowds. After I had memorized the Beatitudes and gone through this very rigorous oratorical demonstration of the Beatitudes, I suddenly stumbled across the first phrase that begins the Beatitudes, where it says, "And when He was sat down His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them saying..." Sitting down was a position that rabbis often assumed when they got ready to give what might be called grave teaching or serious utterance. It involves, not the

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demonstration of oratorical flourishes and crescendos of sound, but it involves reason kind of thinking and gentle persuasion.

This is some of what I have in mind as we approach the Book of Acts tonight. We're going to go as far as we feel it's appropriate to go and maybe we'll cover the first chapter of the Book of Acts, which is the section from the Resurrection to Pentecost.

We want to note some things, however, about Acts as we begin. That is, its placement.

I. First of all, in the canon of Scripture.

It is in a very strategic spot. Have you ever considered what it would be like to not have the Book of Acts at all in the New Testament? It would be very confusing, to say the least, to conclude the Gospel of John, which talks about Jesus asking Peter if he loves Him, and once done with John and with the Gospels, then all of a sudden we open to the next page, which is, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, to the church at Rome." If we had nothing between John and the letter to the Romans, we might legitimately ask, "Who is this person called Paul?" and "How did the gospel get to Rome?" and "Who are these people who are not Jewish?" For the Book of Acts chronicles the thirty years, from the ascension of Jesus until about 63 A.D., with the imprisonment of the apostle Paul in Rome. The whole movement of the Book of Acts gives us an understanding of what happened in the growth of the Church in that time. How we have the ministry of a person like Paul, and how the Church not only has expanded geographically but has got from Jerusalem far away to Rome. But also how it has expanded culturally. Moving from an all-Jewish base to a largely Gentile-base. And without this important historical work, the fifth book of the New Testament, the Book of Acts, we would be in the dark about these things. The Book of Acts, therefore, covers the span of approximately thirty years of time and it's exciting to look at what might be down the road with us historically in the next thirty years.

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Could the next three decades, if Jesus tarried, be the most significant years of expansion of the Church of Jesus Christ, so that they also would require a chronicle of the stature of an Acts?

Who of us can imagine what might be happening in the year 2017, when I am seventy-six years of age, and guess whatever age you are (if you're still alive thirty years from now)? Who in the Early Church, in that birth date of the Church on the Day of Pentecost, could have envisioned what the next thirty years would hold for the Church? But it held a powerful time of expansion.

Who is the author of this book? You will never find him named, of course. As you read through the Gospels, you will never find any of the Gospel authors named. It's striking that Matthew does not name himself, Mark does not name himself, Luke does not name himself, and John does not name himself when they write their Gospels. Nor does Luke again name himself when he writes his second volume. I think that is so significant, because if I were writing a Gospel or a history of the Early Church—and remember that this Book of Acts was the only history of the Church written for three centuries, the next history after it was one written by Eusebius, third century A.D.—if I were writing a book of such powerful persuasion, I would probably want my name attached to it. If, for nothing else, the royalties. Then secondly, the recognition.

Why are the Gospel writers then silent? Why is Luke silent about giving his name? I think there are probably two reasons and they are important for instructing us in some matters in the Church world today. One reason is that the story which they tell is not their personal story, it is not their biography, and it is not their property, therefore. It is the story that belongs to the whole Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not fitting that they superimpose their name or their degree or their talent over what belongs to the Lord and to His people. So, fittingly, they represent it, not as their singular story, but as that which belongs to all of God's people.

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Then I think another reason why they do not name themselves is that there is that infusion of humility which the Lord had inbred in them, that there was to be an honoring of the Lord God and a receding of the claim of the human personality for recognition and the like. So they quietly fade into the background so that they might tell his-story, which is the right hyphenation of history, isn't it? History should be, from the Christian perspective, "His-story." God's story of activity in our lives and on the planet earth.

We look at the placement of this book in the canon, the authorship behind it, the dating of the book, just briefly. If we relied on internal evidence we'd be brought to the conclusion that it was written shortly after the events described in chapter 28 come to an end. Why would the Book of Acts end with an imprisonment if that wasn't all the history that had happened up to that time? If Luke had been writing in 70 or 80 or 90 A.D., it would be very strange that he would end his history with an imprisonment that happened around 63 A.D., unless he intended to write a third volume. So it's probable that he writes somewhat contemporaneously to the events that end the book.

And that's an important point to note. One of the debates in biblical scholarship has to do with the dating of the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Those who tend to operate from a liberal persuasion always select late dates, because they want a late date like 70 or 80 or 90 to say that what we have in the New Testament is the gathering of myth and it took time for the Church to collect its stories and all the biblical writers were really editors. They were not real writers. Furthermore, Luke, for example, like the other Gospel writers, does not give us an account of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. If Luke wrote Luke-Acts prior to 70 A.D., then what is written about the Olivet Discourse, on the Lord's lips, was really prophecy. But if Luke-Acts

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and the other Gospels were written after 70 A.D., then their statements about the destruction of Jerusalem and the words of Jesus may be subject to a claim that they put words in Jesus' mouth. So it is always interesting to look at the internal evidence itself for what the books are saying about the time of their authorship. It implicitly, seemingly in this book, would lead to the conclusion that it was written somewhat contemporaneously with the events that the book ends with.

One other thing, by way of introduction, should be noted and that is the title of the book. We call it "The Acts of the Apostles." And that, of course, does not occur in the original text. It is the title given by an editor, an early editor, to sort of differentiate it from all the other books. That's a good title. The Acts. There are some people in the body of Christ, some evangelicals, who suggest to us that we cannot derive any doctrinal position if it is formulated in the Book of Acts, because doctrinal positions can only be formulated from clear expository or didactic teaching such as in the Gospels or in letters, doctrinal letters, which we see in the Epistles; therefore, that you cannot make doctrine out of experience that is recorded in Acts.

I want to focus, therefore, on the word "Acts" for just a moment. In that, we learn Christian truth by not only hearing it taught. We learn Christian truth by seeing it demonstrated. Truths is just as valid in its demonstration or its modeling as it is when it is being taught Point A, Point B, Point C and Point D. I have learned more truths about the Christian life personally, and I think you may have too, by watching other people live the Christian life; than maybe I have learned through simply reading a treatise on the Christian life.

I learn more, for example, about humility by watching humble people than by reading the latest book on humility. So don't let anyone say to you "The Book of Acts is an interesting book. But it doesn't lead us to any doctrinal formulation." As we get into this book, we will see that the acts

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of God in human history and in the Church in themselves become patterns from which we derive doctrinal perspectives and understandings of experiences that are valid and necessary for the believer today.

“The Acts of the Apostles”: That’s a misnomer, because there aren’t many apostles that Acts really deals with. We’re not told anything about what Thomas did, about what Matthew did.

We’re really only told one or two things about what John did. And what did Judas the son of James do? Or Bartholomew or Andrew? Their stories are not told in the Book of Acts. So, in

reality, it isn’t the Acts of the Apostles. The apostles who are dealt with are Peter, in the first twelve chapters, and Paul, in the last sixteen chapters. There’s an interfacing of those two

apostles in chapter 15. It really focuses on two of the apostles. In a certain respect, as someone

has suggested, it really isn’t the Acts of the Apostles anyway. The whole book is the Acts of the

Holy Spirit. Maybe that title should be where the stress belongs. That same Holy Spirit is alive in the Church today. Even though the Apostles are gone from us, the Holy Spirit is at work.

Let’s look at some of the verses.

Verse 1, “In my former book, Theophilus...” That, of course, is Luke’s reference back to volume one, to the Gospel of Luke itself, which had been dedicated to this person named Theophilus.

You can say that so quickly that you might slur it and get “the awfulest” out of that, but it is

Theophilus. *Theo*, the Greek word for “God” and *philus* coming from “friend of God” or “lover of God.” Some have postulated that this was Luke’s patron, the one who was the benefactor that

provided the financial support necessary for the author to have the two years of research time

that he needed in order to write his manuscript. That’s sheer conjecture. No one knows for sure.

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Others have suggested that Theophilus is a person who is very interested in the Christian faith.

He has a Greek name, suggesting that he is non-Jewish and Luke is writing to persuade him, inform him accurately of all these things.

Others have suggested that Theophilus simply is a representative man for all who will be a friend of God whom this book is addressed to.

When you look at the fact that both Luke and Acts are addressed to the same person, you realize that what you've got here is one book in two volumes. Therefore, Luke himself, by sheer weight of words, becomes the one who writes more New Testament Scripture than any other writer.

Word for word, Luke outproduces Paul. Take all the words of Paul and add them together and stack them against all the words of Luke, and Luke writes more Scripture than does anyone else in the New Testament.

Luke is not writing by what we might call "dictation inspiration." That is, he is not sitting at his desk and saying, "Ok, Lord, what comes next? Would You repeat the last sentence? I didn't get that." He says, in the first volume, in the first four verses, that his method of writing was to consult written sources and to interview eyewitnesses, himself not being an eyewitness. And, on the basis of research, he had inquired as to the accuracy of what was reported to him so that he might set it down in an orderly way. So what the Lord is saying about inspiration, through the writing of Luke, is that the process of the making of Scripture is not some hocus-pocus kind of a thing, where there is a voice that materializes in a room and begins mechanically dictating to a writer. But that the Lord, in breathing the Scripture into being, works through the unique individual and human aspects of the writer and, what the Holy Spirit does in promoting or causing that person to write, is to guarantee the accuracy and authenticity and power of what the author is recording. So the Scripture is, in Luke's case, both the product of his human inquiry,

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superimposed over the direct activity of the Holy Spirit causing him to want to write, causing him to select the right things, to report, and causing those things to be reported accurately and also causing them to be written in such a way that they bring spiritual life to people.

How many of you have ever read dull history? Real history that absolutely rocked you to sleep. I would make a case that inspiration not only carries its Scripture definition of being out-breathed by God, but inspiration, by its very necessity must also be inspiring so that what is written here wakes us up, jabs us, gets us spiritually alive. Part of the inspiration that Luke is writing with has that character to it.

So he's picking up where he had left off in Luke 24, as he opens. He said, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach till the day He was taken up to heaven" (Acts 1:1). Does it strike you that in the phrase "all that Jesus began to do and teach" Luke summarizes his Gospel, volume one—which begins earlier than the other Gospels historically with the annunciation of the angel to Mary and genealogically it goes all the way back to Adam? Matthew only goes to Abraham. Luke tried to push back our border of knowledge about Jesus to as early as he could. He takes us from that annunciation all the way through the ascension in Luke 24. At the beginning of Acts, he summarizes all that epoch of time, saying this is all that Jesus began to do and teach. The inference of that phrase "Jesus began to do and teach," in relationship to the Gospel, is a statement that Luke is making that Jesus is not through teaching or doing. That's the great thing he's saying to the Church right off the bat. "If you think Jesus is history, if you think Jesus is past tense, you've got another thing to consider. Because this same Jesus who has ascended now into heaven is continuing to do and to teach."

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I immediately am drawn to that aspect. In fact, it's the same kind of theme that Mark begins his Gospel with, where he says in an unfinished sentence of verse 1 of chapter 1, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Inferring that everything he writes is only the initiation, the beginning of what Jesus is doing. Whenever we breathe deeply in the New Testament Spirit, we're breathing in the air of a risen living Christ, who is among His people. Not a dead historical figure whose work is over, but a living spiritual reality whose work is just getting started.

I like that. "Until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. After His suffering, His passion, He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days." Jesus' public ministry is sandwiched between two epochs of forty days. The first epoch of forty days, He is totally alone and He is in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan. The last forty days after the resurrection, He is again alone, but with His disciples. He is not with the crowds. He is not appearing to unbelievers. He is ratifying His work to those who have trusted in Him.

What do you think Jesus would be doing in those forty days? I would have liked to have known a lot of things in those forty days, had I had a chance to ask Jesus some questions. I would have liked to have known what the nature of the Trinity is like. I would like for that to be clearly explained to me. If any of you could clearly explain it to everyone's satisfaction in the world, then you need to write a book.

And I would like to know the relationship between predestination and free-will. I would have asked Jesus that in those forty days, because I'm getting asked questions like that by my college

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aged son and his roommate and that has engrossed them ever since their days at Newport Christian High School, the proper relationship between those two things.

I'd also have liked some kind of description of angelic order and the rankings of the seraphs, cherubims, and angels. What it's like to be a common angel. The order and, if you get a chance for promotion and those kinds of things. It would be interesting to know.

I would like to know a little bit about what happens to the spirit when the body dies. I know we go to be with the Lord even while we're putting the body in the ground. But how can I have an existence yet waiting for my body to be resurrected? I know that all of that is going to happen, but I'd like to understand that a little bit better.

I would also like the Lord, maybe, to have shown us some slides of what heaven is like. Surely, He had the capacity to make slides! You don't think the laws of photography were unknown to the Lord, do you? He is the Creator of all things. He could have brought down maybe a few pictures, He could have left some of those behind—they could have financed His Church for a long time, by the way. Jesus had all kinds of fundraising methods that He neglected to employ to make sure His Church stayed well and healthy.

But I'd like to have known that. I would like to know some esoteric secrets—hidden things. The reason I bring this up is that there has always been in Christianity something called Gnosticism. I referred to that a couple weeks ago when I preached on the “kingdom now theology.”

Gnosticism was a church heresy beginning at the end of the first century, extending all the way through the early centuries, that is based upon a Greek word: *gnosis*—knowledge. The gnostics came along and said, “Here we have the external word, but if you come into our group, we're going to give you a hidden interpretation of Scripture. We're going to take you into dreams and revelations. You get in our group and you're no longer going have the milk for babes. You're

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going to get into the real meat and you're going to understand orders and rankings of angels.”

They had all kinds of marvelous mysteries they were expounding. There is always that subtle danger in the body of Christ that we might want to leave the plain things of Scripture and get into things that are not plain readings of Scripture and get into esoteric “truth” or Gnostic “truth.”

We're trying to know and identify with and live in mysteries that aren't any of our business to know and they can't be known because they've never been objectively revealed in the Bible.

It's interesting that Jesus, in those forty days, did not take those forty days as a platform for giving the disciples new teaching which they had not been given during the three years of His earthly ministry. What He's doing in those forty days is restating the basic premise of His early ministry, His three-year ministry. That basic premise had to do with the kingdom of God. If you look at what Jesus is teaching in the Gospels, the focus of what He is saying is always on the kingdom of God. The parables deal, in massive quantities, especially in the Gospel of Matthew, with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, basically defined by Jesus as both now and it is then. It is now in the heart. It is not seen. It is not political. It is not external. It must be received and grow secretly as seed in the soil and it has different levels of growth and responsiveness. But the kingdom then, when the Lord returns, will be one which is political and external and for all. But for right now, the kingdom is within you. And He was reinforcing that message of the kingdom and those days and illustrating why, as the king, He needed to lay down His life in Jerusalem and die for His people.

So He reinforces and reinterprets what He has done in those three years of His ministry, speaking about the kingdom of God. In addition to a doctrinal theme—the kingdom of God—Jesus is also talking about a person. “Don't leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you heard Me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized

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with the Holy Spirit.” Jesus here was saying to the disciples, “In addition to knowing what I’ve taught you, I’m going to give you a gift.” The gift is also referred to here as a baptism. A baptism or immersion with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately, we get into a doctrinal question. Were the disciples at this point saved? Had they made a statement of saving faith in Jesus? And if they were saved, did they not already have the Holy Spirit? The answer to those questions is, “Yes, the Gospel witness makes it clear that they had passed from death into life, beginning with the confession at Caesarea Philippi, when Peter said, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ That is the basis upon which the Christian faith rests.”

Following the resurrection of Jesus Christ in John 20:22, Jesus breathed into them and said, “Receive the Spirit.” In that act of breathing, Jesus recreated the drama of the Garden of Eden, when He took the lifeless form of mortal man and breathed into him air, life. Jesus now, after the resurrection, says, “I’m the new Adam, the second Adam and I have a new life order. Not just biological life, like I gave to Adam, but I now have resurrection life to breathe into you.” So He breathed into them and they received the Spirit. The air, the wind, the reviving power of God in the personality of the Spirit.

We draw the conclusion from this that anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and His power and His resurrection from the dead is a receiver of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit indwells every born-again Christian. I say this as a Pentecostal preacher who teaches that there is a subsequent experience with the Holy Spirit beyond conversion—a baptism in the Spirit beyond conversion. Jesus, here in Acts 1:5, is not talking about the conversion experience. They’ve already had that in John 20, when He’s breathed upon them and ratified to them the benefits of resurrection life. But He’s saying now, “There is yet a subsequent experience in which you, My

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disciples, who have believed in Me, are going to get saturated with the Spirit.” We’ll look at this more as we come to those passages in the Book of Acts.

Jesus was very concerned that His disciples not try to go out and do things in their own power. If a group of us had been present on that occasion, when Jesus ascended into heaven, we might legitimately say, “Now that He’s gone, what are we going to do?” We might have a planning committee. And I would suggest we develop a statement of mission. Then we develop a statement of objectives. Then we develop our strategies. Then we prioritize the strategies ad infinitum.” We go at this from a method system. We do good process management and get to the conclusion that we have to go to the entire world, so guys, we’ve got to figure all this out.

I’m not against appropriate planning and the like, but I am deeply committed to the fact that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world to do a lot of leapfrogging. There are times when I’m connecting point A, point B, point C and D in my logical and methodical manner, and it’s the Holy Spirit’s intention to absolutely leapfrog over BCDEF to get all the way from A to G in one fell swoop. He’s going for it. There are times we simply have to realize that the Holy Spirit is what He says He is. He is air or wind and He can come in with a great gust and suddenly lift us further than we ever dreamed. We must not always think of spiritual growth as something which is like biological growth—steady and progressive. Spiritual growth is that. We add line to line and precept to precept. But there are also occasions when, seemingly spiritually, we just go from here and all of a sudden we have a powerful encounter with God and we’re all the way over here. Thirty minutes maybe have gone by, but we’ve had a tremendous transformation.

Jesus says to His Church, “You need this Holy Spirit because the mission I’m giving to you is too big for you to do with your own thinking, no matter how bright you are. You’ve got to rely

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on a power that is stronger than your own.” The Church has to rely upon the person of God to do the work of God. If it doesn’t, it’s stagnant in the water.

So you’ll receive the Holy Spirit, a promise not just made to them, but I believe a promise we’ll see as we go through Acts, made to all of us. Don’t leave Jerusalem. Don’t get busy doing things until you’ve got this power and this baptism. So everything’s wrapped up. Forty days go by.

He’s talked to them about His program, the kingdom of God, and the person, the Holy Spirit.

They just have one loose end when it’s all done. The loose end is this: Jesus, where is the kingdom? They’re still hung up on this. “We believe You’re the king, the Messiah. It’s going to now be in our hearts. But when are You going to give this kingdom to Israel?” They lived in a culture which had differing perspectives of when the kingdom was going to come.

It’s interesting that the culture of their day was exactly like the culture of our day. If you look at camps in Christianity today, there’s no difference in those camps and the camps in Judaism at this time in the writing of the Book of Acts. There were those who were called the Essenes.

There were those who, in relation to the kingdom of God, said, “The world is so messed up, we can’t do anything about it. We’re not even going to try. We’re going to go out into the desert, found our own community, get our own act together and get holy and cleaned up. If we get holy enough and purified enough someday, the teacher of righteousness may come, and if He comes, He’ll come to us. And to “you know where” with the rest of the world.” That group is represented in the Church today by those who quote the verse “Come out from among them and be ye separate.”

“Touch not the unclean thing.” They’re in a sense saying, “We want to live in our own closed quarters. Don’t make us have contact with anybody. We’re the holy club. When Jesus comes back to earth, He’s going to come to our church and our pastor and our denomination, us three

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and no more, praise God. The kingdom of God is washed up with the world. It's all headed for the wastebasket, but we're the righteous ones, the Essenes. The kingdom isn't coming to those people out there. It's waiting for us."

Then there were the zealots who said, "None of this. God Himself delays the kingdom to see if we're serious about it. So let's get involved. We've got to show good faith in the Lord. So let's get involved in politics and let's show the Messiah that we mean business. Let's kick out Rome. Let's take over the government. Let's dominate society. Let's have the kingdom here and now. And to do this, if we need to, let's use force." They were called the zealots. They said, "The kingdom can't come until the Lord sees we're serious about bringing the kingdom. Then, when we get everything ready for Him, we can roll out the red carpet and say, "Even so, come."

Then there were the Sadducees, what we would call the liberal wing of the church, who said, "All this stuff about a kingdom! It ain't never gonna come, folks! This is the best of all possible worlds. And everybody's got to have a religious system, because people need religion. So since they need religion, let's provide the institutions, let's make a good living off of religion, but let's not take things too seriously, let's forget this stuff about miracles and angels and revealed truth and stuff like this. Let's just say whatever goes, goes. Let's keep the system going and keep the pious few gullible and help use the revenues to found the great enterprises we're involved in."

Then there were the Pharisees, with whom Jesus mostly identified, who said, "We must do the best we can in the midst of this wicked, perverse generation. Let's live, not separated from society but let's maintain an inner code that's different." They extended that to, "Let's also maintain an outer code of dress that separates us."

But they were all, in one way or another, looking for the kingdom. So the disciples coming out of that matrix said, "Lord, what about the kingdom? When is Your kingdom going to come? Are

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You going to restore Israel now?” Jesus didn’t say to them, “Don’t you know yet that the millennium is never going to happen, all of those promises with Israel are all over. They’re all in the past. I’ve aggregated them and there’s a whole new covenant in effect. Jerusalem will never become the world capital and the temple will never be rebuilt and the antichrist is never going to come and the Messiah will never sit on the throne of Jerusalem—all that stuff is relegated to the past. Don’t you know that yet? I’m going to have to stay with you guys forty more days and get your theology straightened out!”

He doesn’t answer them that way. He just says to them, “It’s not for you to know the *chronos* or the *kairos*—the times or the seasons.” Those are two Greek words—synonyms. *Chronos* is the word from which we get “chronology,” some of what you’re doing when you look at your watch. You’re watching “chronology”—time—go by. It’s not for you to know the length of time or the *kairos*—the season of time—the appropriate time, the right time, the quality of time. It’s not for you to know quantity of time or quality of time. But it’s instead for you to do something else. It’s time for you to receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

Power. I hear, at various times, preachers point out that the basic word underlying “power” here is the word *dunamis*, from which we derive the word “dynamite.” The only problem with dynamite is that it blows people up. I’m not sure that what Jesus is promising here is a TNT experience. What He is promising is that He is going to do, in regard to our potential, two things. All of us have potential which we have not tapped. It’s just native potential, native ability. Power involves the capacity to reach your potential. That’s one dimension to it.

The second dimension is this: that there is potential in you that you don’t see, that only God Himself sees. And the power of the Holy Spirit is to cause you to walk in that second level of potential that is even beyond the potential you have as a native human being. I think that’s

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fabulous! God's not all done making me yet. There are times when I get so frustrated with what I'm doing, and my lack of ability and my inadequacy, that I need a good shot in the arm like this that says, "God has not given up on producing potential in my life that is there, both in the natural man and the spiritual man, that is beyond the capacity that I can see personally." He wants to give us that *dunamis* of the Holy Spirit so that we might be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

You look at the task of the Early Church. I've made this comparison before, but if you took the then known number of people in the world, you'd get the magnitude of the task that they faced. There were approximately four million people in Palestine at the time. In Jerusalem and Judea, about four million. About the amount of people that are in Israel today. One hundred and twenty people for the four million. Or one believer for every thirty-three thousand people. Since there are roughly a hundred and ten thousand people in Costa Mesa and Newport Beach, that would amount up to about four believers to reach those two towns. There were approximately two hundred and fifty million people in the then Roman world, which means there was one believer for every 1.2 million people. If I were looking at those odds as a statistician, wow!

One of the evidences for Christianity is that the Church is here after twenty centuries. And that the Church of Jesus Christ penetrated the world. And that it grew from a small little group of a hundred and twenty and had a powerful effect. In fact, within thirty years, it was so powerful that it could not be numbered. After a while, even the Book of Acts gave up counting. In fact, after the Day of Pentecost, the Church could never again fit in a single room. You know that we will never again be in a single room until we're in that great banquet hall in the kingdom to come. At one time, the Church from all centuries and ethnic groups and backgrounds is going to gather and, all at one time, bring in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. That's the next time we'll all be

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in one room. Acts 1 and 2 is the last time the Church was in a single room. It's going to explode beyond that. It's going to have a ministry.

Let no one look at the size of a challenge and say it can't be done. One of the real tendencies we have as Christians, and I think this is especially true for us in Orange County, is that we're all seeking close personal relationships, because we live in such an impersonal world and we're separated from our extended families, many of us. We often say of the church, "I sure hope the church doesn't grow much because I don't like big churches." I know what people mean when they say that. It's a pain to be lost in a crowd and not know anybody. But yet, if the church is going to be true to its mission of extending the gospel to every single human being, growth is part and parcel with what God has to do. It means we've got to get ourselves in a growth modality or a growth pattern or growth mentality where, instead of wanting things to stay small so we can be comfortable, we want the kingdom to expand so we can have more responsibility. Do you want to be more comfortable or do you want more responsibility? That will, to a great degree, determine how mature you are as a believer. Immature believers want to be comfortable. They don't want to have to do anything. In a comfortable church, you know everybody's name. In a growing church, you'll never know everybody's name—there's too much going on. In a comfortable church, everybody has a job and there are plenty of people who don't have to do anything. In a church that's growing, there's always going to be a need for more and more workers to be involved, because we're in a responsibility mode of our spiritual life and behavior. Be my witnesses. "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes. And a cloud hid him from their sight" (Acts 1:9). That's better than any blast-off at Cape Canaveral. I'd like to have seen it.

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Here is something that absolutely defies all the laws of physics. Without engines, the Lord blasts off. Then you have to ask the question, where did He go? How did He survive in the ionosphere when He got up to thirty thousand feet? What was going on? Did He have to fly through the planets? How far did He go? Is the dwelling place of God somewhere out there in the universe? The edge of the universe is supposed to be ten billion light years out there. Which means that if you travel 186,282 miles per second for ten billion years, you're going to get there. But even when you get there, there may be more out there and you still haven't stepped out of time and space. So when it says, "Jesus ascended into heaven," heaven must not simply be the blue sky. Heaven must be outside the created order and it doesn't take ten billion light years to get there. Just like it doesn't take ten billion light years for our prayers to reach God. But stepping outside of time and space in a dimension no telescope has yet probed, Jesus goes from earth to heaven! If you're not into the miraculous, Christianity is not for you. There's just too much happening here. One of the things we know about the gospel of Jesus Christ and the change that was produced in the disciples' life is that they were eyewitnesses to all this. They were eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. They were eyewitnesses to the living Christ who presented Himself with infallible proofs. And they were eyewitnesses to His ascension. A common person without that experience would not have believed any of that stuff. But they were credible people who saw it and bore witness to it.

One other note about the ascension I would like to point out. It's from observation of having been in the Holy Land a number of times. The Mount of Olives is one of my very favorite places. It was obviously one of Jesus' favorite places. He loved to pray at the base of the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane. He taught on the Mount of Olives one of His great discourses, the Olivet Discourse, directly facing the Temple Mount. He walked over the Mount

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of Olives to Bethany, day in and day out, the last week. And He ascended from the Mount of Olives.

Even in Jesus' day, the Mount of Olives, like today, is a burial ground. In Judaism, if you want to be buried, it's the spot. My first choice would be to be buried on the Mount of Olives. I don't know how you'd get me in there—Muslims on one side and the Jewish people on the other side. I don't think there's a Christian cemetery there. But there are graves on the Mount of Olives that go back for millennia. Not just centuries—millenniums! On that spot, the Mount of Olives, which is littered with burial stones—the whole mountainside is covered with burial stones; in that place of death, Jesus becomes the one human being that, instead of going down into the Mount of Olives, goes up from the Mount of Olives.

The point was not lost on the contemporaries of Jesus' days, that here is a person who didn't go into the ground but He went up from the ground and He took the symbolic spot of all of Judaism for burial to take place, to make it a place of triumph and ascension. It was a masterstroke and plan. Whoever says the Lord doesn't plan things out...He's a strategist. He's going to take the symbols of death and turn them into symbols of life.

And Zachariah says, "He's going to come back to the Mount of Olives." I'll be in heaven and won't watch TV then. But I'd like to see the news reports of all the open graves on the Mount of Olives.

"They looked intently up in the sky as he was going when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. [Notice they didn't have wings or anything like that. They were just wearing white clothes.] 'Men of Galilee. Why do you stand here looking into the sky? The same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you've seen him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:10-11). There are some saying, in our day—like there were Gnostics in the

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apostles' day saying—that Jesus is not going to have a literal return to earth. His coming is going to be a coming in the transformed lives of His children. It will be a hidden coming. Here's the rebuttal to that point of view, saying that the coming of Jesus will be as visible and as evidently physical as His ascension into heaven.

Jesus enters into heaven and the Church then does some things that we read about in verses 12–26, that give us the character of the Early Church. I want to spend just a few moments here talking about this pre-Pentecostal, powerful Church. That when a church begins to move in these qualities (there are four qualities that are noted here from in verses 12–26) or when an individual Christian begins to move in these qualities, they open themselves up to a tremendous work of the Holy Spirit.

I. The first quality is obedience.

That is always the mark of mature discipleship and of a vital church. What the disciples did after Jesus ascended was—instead of immediately dispersing and beginning to carry the good news—remember that Jesus said, “Go back to Jerusalem and wait.” So even though they didn't understand it and even though they had to be bursting with joy to be able to tell that story to other people, they obeyed and went back.

II. The second thing that they did was meet together in unity.

There was the Twelve who are named. They were joined constantly in prayer along with the women. It's not just a male group. The last mention we have of Mary in the Bible was of her in a prayer meeting, and she wasn't leading the prayer meeting, either, she wasn't being prayed to. That should be noted. She was part of the prayer meeting. And Jesus' brothers, who previously in the Gospels are mentioned as being alienated from Him and not believing Him—they're there. In fact, the number all together is about one hundred and twenty. Acts 2:1 tells us they were all

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together in one place. There was tremendous unity. They stayed in that place together for ten days.

I'd like to put before you the idea that unity takes time. One of the problems we have in the contemporary church is we don't have time. I find, in the church, that people only take time, that about 70 or 80 percent of the Church of Jesus Christ today takes time to be together with the Body one hour a week in a structured worship setting, and that is it. I am going to make a flat out statement: As long as the church continues in that pattern, it will never ever have revival. It is absolutely impossible to have revival when you only give one hour a week to being together with God's people. It'll never happen. It'll not happen in a billion centuries. It takes a significant amount of being together, and not just being together socially but being together spiritually, praying together, singing together, hearing God's Word together, testifying together. It takes that being together to provide a matrix of that warmth and relationship which becomes the fertile soil in which to place a new believer, a converted believer. Instead of putting a new believer into a community of strangers, the church has to be a living web of deep interpersonal human relationships that have been graced by the Spirit of God.

I will share with you as pastor that I do not know how to change the trend the church is in. We are in a humongously busy culture. Everybody is going every single direction they can go. We've got mobility. We've got financial mobility. We've got homes on wheels. We've got income that often allows people to be able to take time to pursue personal pursuits. There's nothing wrong with any of these things by themselves. Except, ultimately, they produce a devastating effect on the church, because people do not have time to be the church.

What would happen if as a pastor I asked everybody in the congregation next year, from July 1 to July 10, to plan their ten vacation days and not doing anything off on your own, but go to get a

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place and go off together and spend ten days singing, praying, eating, fellowshiping and waiting upon God and hearing God's Word. We're going to take ten solid days as a church. Once you come, you can't leave. You have to be there and the whole church has to go. Not a single person can be left out. If we did that for ten days, you could write the history of this church in block letters a mile high, because it would absolutely explode. You can't have that kind of a group experience in the presence of the Holy Spirit and not have something significant happen to alter people's relationships with God and with one another forever. As long as the church is fooling around with one structured hour a week, it may gain a little bit of ground, but it's not going to dynamically penetrate society. I wish that weren't true, but I'm afraid it is. I'm frustrated as a pastor with the state of the church in that area.

Unity is essential and it takes time. These guys, they weren't independently rich. To my understanding, Peter and the boys were middle-class fishermen. They didn't have people just independently supporting them. But these people took time to be together. They were at the beginning of a whole new thing God was doing on the earth and it took time. They forged unity. The Holy Spirit forged unity among them. That's critical.

III. Another thing which they did that's so important is that they got into the Word.

They obeyed the Lord. They had unity. And they got into the Word. We know that they got into the Word because of what they did. Peter, as this meeting is progressing, has been troubled because he's been reading Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, two psalms Peter understands to talk about the enemy of the Lord. The innocent one described in those two psalms has an enemy. Jesus is the innocent one and He had an enemy—Judas. Those two psalms eloquently speak of the fate of Judas. They contain phrases (those two psalms do) like "May his place be deserted and let there be no one to dwell in it." And "May another take his place of leadership." Peter's reading along

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in those psalms and he says, “Somebody’s got to be appointed to his position.” There’s a Scripture that says, “Let another take his place.”

So they select a person to replace the fallen Judas. I don’t want to get into the whole thing of the mystery of Judas. I simply want to note that it was as a result of studying the Scripture that the Early Church made the decision to replace him. Some said the Early Church, right at the beginning, before Pentecost, made a mistake, they didn’t have the Holy Spirit yet and they do something prematurely. God had saved that twelfth place for the apostle Paul. The Early Church got presumptuous and jumped in.

I say humbug! Because here’s the Church’s very first decision after the Lord had ascended into heaven and they were going straight to the Scripture for guidance. If you can’t get guidance from the Scripture, then what can you trust? I refuse to believe, I can’t see it even as logical, to believe that in the very first decision the Church reaches after Christ has already risen is blundering into mistakes. I just can’t buy that. They read the Scripture. They absorbed the Scripture and wanted to be guided by it. This is in real contradistinction with people today who would have said, “No, let’s not go to Scripture. Let’s pray and get a revelation. Who’s got a revelation? Who’s got the gift of prophecy as to who’s supposed to replace Judas?”

No, it wasn’t that at all. It was, “Get in the Word and see if it has any direction.” Then they did some very common things. They said, “There’s got to be some qualifications for replacement. You had to be with Jesus from the baptism of John until now.” That was their qualification to be an apostle. It says there were only two that fit the bill. The two were Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. So what did they do? They prayed and then they cast lots, or drew straws, and the lot fell to Matthias. Is that spiritual? The twelfth apostle is selected by flipping a coin! That’s what it was, flipping a coin. Again, they were being scriptural. Proverbs 16:33 says, “The lot is cast into

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the lap but the decision is from the Lord.” The decision is wholly from the Lord. You flip the coin but God determines which side it’s going to land on. What had they done? They said, “We’ve used all the intelligence we knew how to make criteria for leadership. We had two choices. In the natural, we didn’t know which choice to make, so we simply left the decision to God. And since Proverbs 16:33 gives us persimmon to cast lots, we cast lots and the lot fell to Matthias.”

Can you do that to understand God’s will for your life? Can you flip a coin? You’re going with two girls; you’re not sure which one is the right one. You flip a coin. It might work. We’ll talk later, as we go through Acts, about how to make decisions in the will of God, but that certainly is an intriguing one. They were trying to be true to Scripture.

One parenthetical thing that doesn’t relate to any of the three points, but just a sideline that to me is kind of interesting: in verse 13, the last of the eleven apostles that is named is Judas, son of James. In Luke 6, which contains another listing of the apostles, Luke also lists him as Judas, son of James. But Matthew and Mark, in listing the apostles, never refer to this man as Judas, son of James. He’s known by another name— Thaddaeus. Luke is always the historian of accuracy; he always goes back for the precise. What evidently happened in the Early Church was, as time went along, this Judas number two, called Judas son of James, not Judas Iscariot, got tired of people saying to him, “You sure have a lousy name.” Or, “Are you related to Judas Iscariot?” So he said, “I’m tired of that name. From now on, just call me Thaddaeus.” So he got a different name. That’s why the listing of names is different.

You’ll notice, also, that in Matthew’s Gospel, Judas went out and hanged himself. Luke tells us that Judas bought a field where he fell headlong, his body burst and of all his intestines spilled out. Those two accounts, Matthew and Acts, are not contradictory, for indeed, in the course of a

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hanging, there could have been the kind of fall that is described in Luke with his intestines breaking and spilling out.

By the way, the field of blood in Jerusalem is at the western end of the Valley of Hinnom, the Valley of Hell. That is suggestive of the fact that, when we get out of God's will, we wind up in hell, the trash dump of Jerusalem.

The Early Church was committed to obedience. It was definitely committed to unity. It was committed to the Word.

IV. Then the fourth quality of a growing dynamic Christian or a growing dynamic church is that it was committed to prayer.

They prayed constantly (verse 14). They all joined constantly in prayer. Verse 24 says, "Then they prayed." There was a specific prayer. I mentioned this about a year and a half ago, before we began our quarterly prayer meetings in the church. I had had a conversation with the person who had been a spiritual confidant of Billy Graham and a great help for Billy in the prayer ministry. He said, "If you go into an average church and look at their literature or program, you'll find that the church almost never gathers together for prayer. It has everything else on the agenda but prayer." He said, "God has called me to a ministry to make the main things out of the plain things in Scripture. Prayer is the main thing and it's the plain thing."

The Christian life and the church cannot be built simply by the implementation of good programs, no matter how well conceived and executed the programs are, some of the programs ought to be executed. It's prayer that is the life of the Church. Depending and submission on the Lord for His will and His leadership, being open to a fresh sweep of the Spirit. The Church, at the close of Acts 1, has no idea of the explosion that is in store for it. It is on the edge of a great miracle and doesn't even know it at that moment.

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I would suggest to you that, anytime in your life or any time the church corporately does the same kind of things that are done in chapter 1, that church or that person is again on the edge of a tremendous explosion and powerful moving of the Lord. But somewhere along the line, there has got to be an unreserved commitment to obey the Lord. There has to be a willingness to commit the time to be together in unity, not just union, but unity. Union is when you tie two cats' tails together. You have union but you don't have unity. The church of Jesus Christ is often like that. We've got people all together in union and our names are on the membership roll or on the contribution record, but there are differences and sharp feelings and animosity and hidden agendas and turfs to protect and all those kinds of things, which speak of union, but not unity. Somehow, the church has got to get past that, with double and triple doses of forgiveness and reconciliation, and say, "In Christ we will be united." We'll ask the Spirit to unite us, to help us take the time to be united past unity, into a real absorption with God's Word and achieve that all in prayer. There's no telling what God will do when that combination is fulfilled.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, we pray for the church today, for this church, for our lives personally. As we watch the events in the Book of Acts, our hearts open wide with anticipation. We want to present ourselves to You, Lord Jesus, and say, "Here we are Lord. Do it again." May the story of Pentecost and the expansion of the church not be something we simply read about in the Bible or in the history books. May our own eyes see and our own lips proclaim the glory of God to our generation. Visit Your church again with a new Pentecost. Visit us again with Your Holy Spirit and power and might. We offer ourselves to You, that Your will might be done on earth through us. In Jesus' name. Amen.