

I'm A Christian, Now What? (Part 2) – Acts 1:1-14

Acts 1:6-8. Before we get there, I hope it's not lost on you that this Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. Marking the 1973 Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion. It's a reminder to grieve, remember, give thanks, and pray.

Grieve, because 60M babies have been killed over the course of the last 45 years. One of the greatest tragedies and travesties in the history of our country. On our watch. We ought to grieve.

And if you've *had* an abortion, this is an occasion to remember the *loss* of your baby. Resting in God's forgiveness and grace, but never forgetting, and urging others not to make the *same* mistake.

3rd, this weekend is a reminder to give thanks. For the small *victories* along the way. Like the recent decision at the federal level, empowering states to divert funds from *abortion* providers, to pro-life pregnancy centers. And the recent decision by Planned Parenthood, the *largest* abortion provider, to close 32 of its clinics. One of them right here in Bettendorf. It's cause for thanks.

And last, this day is a reminder to pray. Pray, because ~1500 abortion clinics remain open across the country. And a portion of our tax dollars continue to support some of them in the name of women's health. And though the number of abortions is declining, 3/4M babies still lost their lives last year. We need to pray. Especially that we won't become lax, complacent, or discouraged in our effort to *end* abortion (pray).

Father, will you rend our hearts over this? Will you sensitive us to the ongoing killing of babies in the womb? Will you change the minds and hearts of those considering an abortion, and those in favor of it? Will you thwart the efforts of those who advocate such things? Will you forgive us for our complacency, and spur us on to oppose it? Thank you for those on the front lines of this fight. Encourage them and bolster them. We grieve, and rest only in your comfort. We remember, and rest only in your forgiveness. We give thanks, and rest only in your grace. And we pray, resting only in your name. Jesus' name. Amen.

➤ That said, we're a few weeks into a new series and new study, with a new theme to go along – *Compelled*. B/c that's what people *were* in the book of Acts. Compelled to pray, compelled to go, compelled to share, and compelled to know.

So last week, I encouraged you to . . .

1. Know the facts about Jesus.

So often, when someone becomes a Christian, a child of God, they ask or wonder, "Now what? And part of the answer is to know all you *can* about Jesus.

Including . . .

- His ministry timeline
- His works and teaching
- His commands

To go, preach, and make disciples.

• His death and resurrection

The facts on which our entire *faith* rests.

• His post-resurrection appearances

Proving it's true and removing our doubt. Followed by . . .

• His preaching

About the kingdom of God and our part in it. And . . .

• His promise

His promise to baptize us with his Holy Spirit. Marking us and setting us apart by his power and presence in our lives.

Those are the things about Jesus that Luke assumes we *know* in v1-5, so that our faith isn't based on feelings, but facts.

➤ Which brings us to Part 2 and v6.

[6] *So when they had come together* [for the last time; having been promised a baptism of the Holy Spirit, which they couldn't have imagined], *they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

It's a question that betrays a serious misunderstanding of God's purposes and intent. Granted, Jesus told them in Lk 22:30 that they would sit on *thrones* in his kingdom, leading and judging. But that was yet to come. And still is. In the Millennium. The thousand year reign of Christ when he returns. Until then, things are going to be different Jesus said.

But they didn't get it. They still thought that a return to the glory days of King *David* was in store. And that *ethnic* Israel was the focus of God's work. And now must be the time. "*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*"

John Calvin, the famous pastor and theologian around the time of the Reformation, said . . . "There are as many errors in this question as there are words." It's a bit tongue and cheek, but it's true. The apostles were off.

Which just goes to show, that even the most *informed* among us, even the most *learned* can get it wrong. Especially about the future. And we should therefore hold our convictions on such things with the utmost humility.

➤ That said, with the benefit of hindsight we know the answer to this question is *no*. He *wasn't* going to restore the kingdom at that time. B/c that's what history shows. But that's not how *Jesus* responded. He chose to make a *greater* point. V7.

[7] *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.*

IOW this isn't your concern. That's the Father's business. *His* purview. His jurisdiction. Strictly need to know. Or as Dt 29 says it, *the secret things belong to the Lord* (v29). So leave them there and trust him. That's the point Jesus is making.

And boy, would *that* keep us out of trouble. Instead of focusing on the things he *hasn't* revealed, we would focus on the things he *has*. Instead of obsessing on the extras . . . We would attend to the essentials. The core instead of the peripheral. *The secret things belong to the Lord*. So leave them there and trust him.

- Which brings us to v8. The key to the entire book of Acts. And the mission of every church. You're not going to get *insider* information Luke just said . . .
[8] *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*"

As a side note, that's the outline of the entire book.

With chapters 1-7 telling of the witness in *Jerusalem*. Chapters 8-11 the witness in *Judea and Samaria*. And chapters 12-28, *to the end of the earth*.

But *more* important, is Jesus' point. That times and *seasons* aren't for you, but power and responsibility *are*. Which provides the 2nd answer to our question, "Now what?"

And that is . . .

2. Live and speak for Jesus (v6-8)

Now that you're a Christian, know the facts about Jesus, and live and speak for Jesus.

It's not for us to know the *timing* of God's plans, but it *is* for us to receive *power* as Jesus fulfills them. It *is* for us to be his *witnesses* in order to advance them.

It *is* for us, to live and *speak* for him.

That's a *witness* as Jesus says it. Someone who *lives* in such a way as to draw *attention* to Jesus, and *speaks* in such a way to *point* people to him. Lead people to him.

IOW witnesses represent. They *represent*.

- **George Whitefield** was such a powerful evangelist in 18th century England, that people got up at 5 in the morning to go to church and hear him.
And on one particular occasion, a man saw the Scottish philosopher and *skeptic* David Hume making his way to the church. Which, as you can imagine, puzzled him.
Why would such an ardent cynic and doubter get up at 5am to hear a preacher?

So he approached Mr. Hume and said, "I thought you did not believe in the gospel."

To which Hume replied, "I do not, but *he* does." (Hughes, 17)

IOW Whitefield lived and spoke in such a way about Jesus, that people couldn't *help* but listen. They couldn't *help* but be curious. That's a *witness*.

- Or how about **David Livingstone**, the famous missionary to Africa in the 1800's?
It's reported that when Sir Henry Stanley, an American journalist and explorer, found Livingstone (**quote**) and spent some time with him, he said this . . .
"If I had been with him any longer, I would have been compelled to be a Christian, and he never spoke to me about it at all." (Barclay, Acts, 5)

A large part of our responsibility as followers of Jesus, is to live and speak for Jesus.****
Drawing attention to him by what we do, and pointing people to him by what we say.

And we can do it, b/c we've been given the *power* to do it.

• **We have the power.**

The power to be intentional. The power to be thoughtful. The power to be disciplined.
The power to speak. The power to *live* differently. The power to love. The power to forgive. The power to exercise self-control.

We have the means. The ability and capability, every single day of our lives.

- When I was growing up, I used to watch "The 6 Million Dollar Man" with my parents. For those of you under 40, you might think of it as the prequel to all the Marvel movies. Anyway, I'll never forget the **intro to each show**. 1973. Check it out.
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CPJ-AbCsT8> 2:05-2:30) Man is that cheesy.

"Gentlemen, we can rebuild. We *have* the technology. We *have* the capability."

And thereby Steve Austin was endowed w/ super human strength, super human speed, and super human eyesight.

Just like we've been given super-*natural* strength. Super-*natural* power. *Spiritual* insight.
B/c better than any bionics, we have the Holy *Spirit* within us. The God of the universe.
And *with* him, the power to witness. The power to *be* witnesses.

- To *live* in such a way, as to refrain from sin and pursue holiness.
Setting ourselves apart in how we go about our work, interact with our spouse, raise our families, and spend our money. We have the power.
The ability and *capability* to *live* for Christ.

And, *speak* for Christ. We have the power to share his good news, with boldness. Even when we're scared.

In fact, that's when we experience his power the most. When we're weak.

- If you've embraced the gospel – the good news that Jesus made you, loves you, died for your sins, and rose again so you could have life to the full and life forever . . .
If you believe that, if you believe in *him*; and you've repented of your sins and declared him Lord of your life – you have the ability to tell somebody else.
The *capability* to be his witness. The *power* to live and speak for him.

Which is a good thing, b/c living and speaking for Jesus is also our responsibility.

• **It's our responsibility.**

Given the power, it's our duty to apply it.

You say, "Pastor, I don't really feel like it. I don't *want* to talk about Jesus. I don't *want* to stand out. I don't want to be different."

To which I would say, based on these verses, you don't have a choice. It's part of your *responsibility* as a witness. Part of your calling.

And lest you think it was just for the apostles, think again.

We are his witnesses just like *they* were. And just like the early church. And just like the apostles taught in the *rest* of the New Testament.

If you're a child of God, you too are his witness. It's a responsibility for *all* of us.

You will receive power . . . and you will be my witnesses Jesus said. Pretty clear.

- And it's high time we acted like it.
Instead of flying under the radar, we need to speak up.
Instead of living the world's way, we need to live his way.
Instead hiding our light under a bushel, we need to let it shine.
It's time to *be* the witnesses we are.

➤ And as you do, see if the power isn't unleashed. See if the power of the Holy Spirit within you, isn't released on those around you. And in your *own* life.
See if he doesn't begin to impact those who hear.
See if you don't begin to sense changes in those who listen.

I'm not talking about a fireworks display. Where somebody you've led to Christ stands up in the restaurant and tells everybody around. That *could* happen.
But more often than not you'll start to see a softening. Sense a quickening. A curiosity. You'll get a question. A comment. A veiled reference to something spiritual.

And when you do, when you hear it, when you see it or sense it – stay engaged. Keep talking and keep listening. And ask *more* questions.

➤ I can't count the number of times in my life, where somebody finally made a comment or asked a question, and I froze.
Or intentionally didn't respond with another question to draw them out.
Thinking I didn't want to make them feel uncomfortable. I didn't want to push it.

And oh how I regret it. Like the time in the trading pit, when a group of guys turned to me on a slow day, and asked me what the gospel is. Kid you not.
And though I responded, and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in doing so, b/c it came out as clear and concise as I've ever articulated it with no warning . . .
I didn't follow up. I didn't ask, "Why do you ask? What brought *that* up? What do *you* think?" I just finished the explanation, and that was it.

And to this day, I so wish I would've said more. I so wish I had gotten over myself and my aversion to feeling uncomfortable, and *said* something. Anything.
I so wish I hadn't let the situation keep me from *continuing* the conversation.
I so wish I'd let the Holy Spirit take over, and set my fears aside.

➤ If someone cracks the door open, walk through it! Be strong. Be courageous. *For the Lord your God is with you* (Josh 1:8).
And if you've read them wrong, so be it. If your follow up falls flat, who cares?
Better to be wrong and plant a seed, than miss an opportunity for a harvest.

Unleash the power. *Fulfill* your responsibility. I guarantee, you'll never regret it.

➤ We have the *power* to live and speak for Jesus, it's our *responsibility* to live and speak for Jesus, and 3rd, we should do so . . .

• **Everywhere we go.**

Look at v8 again. You're not going to receive *insider* information . . .

[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

First of all, that *had* to have been a shocker.

I mean, Jerusalem? Really? The very place Jesus was crucified at the urging of the crowds? And Judea? Where the brood of religious vipers lay?

Samaria? Land of the half-breeds, as the Jews thought of them? With the Gentiles beyond? You've got to be kidding.

And yet that's exactly what Jesus said. Not so much as a command, but a statement of fact. A statement of prophecy.

This is who you are and what you're all about. Live and speak for me, everywhere you go. Everywhere you live, everywhere you stay, everywhere you visit . . .
And everywhere you are. Here, there, and everywhere. That's the idea.

➤ Starting with your *own* Jerusalem. Your *own* circle of influence. Those *closest* to you. Like your family, friends, and co-workers. That's *your* Jerusalem. My Jerusalem. And then comes your *Judea*. The people you *live* near, or play with. Your neighborhood. People similar to you.
Followed by your *Samaria*. The people you *don't* want to talk to, and the places you *don't* want to go. The people you'd rather avoid.
And last, are the places you *haven't* gone, or haven't heard. The ends of the *earth*. It's our responsibility to live and speak for Jesus, everywhere we go.

➤ And not just individually, but corporately. It's also our responsibility as a *church*. The *you* in v8 is plural. He's speaking to a group. *You will be my witnesses*. Together. Which means it's our responsibility as a *church*. To cover *all* the Jerusalem's, *all* the Judea's and Samaria's, *all* the earth. Something no one person could *ever* do.

But *together* we can. And should.

Together, as a church, we can go and we can send, *everywhere*. Especially to those people and places who have never heard.

The only question, is whether we do it. Whether we *fulfill* our responsibility, or abdicate it. *Do* his will, or not. (**Summary**)

➤ Why not make a commitment to be a faithful witness? To be who you are.
Why not resolve right now to live your life and open your mouth every chance you get – here, there, and everywhere?

Quench the Spirit no longer. Grieve him no more.

Live and speak in the strength that he supplies. The power he gives. (1 Pet 4:10-11)
B/c it's *there*. The power's there. *Waiting* to be unleashed.

Pray – Lord, may you find us faithful to be your witnesses. May you find us mindful of our responsibility. And may you fill us with your Spirit for the power we need.