

Introduction: Last week we launched into a new preaching series in the book of Acts, but we did it with an interview with Mike and Alyssa Brill, our missionaries in Spain. The reason that update was the perfect launch into our new series is because it really is the modern continuation of the ancient story of Acts.

The book of Acts is in many ways the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. And it helps us see what some of the first Christians did and how the gospel and the church went from just over one hundred believers in and near Jerusalem to a movement whose central gospel message was being declared to some of the highest officials in Rome...and now today the spreading flame of the gospel ignited in Acts burns strong all around the world. And last week we heard how it's spreading now among a new people in Spain.

This is the unique piece of our series. The book of Acts tells us about the ancient beginnings of the spread of the gospel. But all along the way in our series we're going to have the opportunity to hear from a number of our Alliance International workers like the Brills to updates us on how that gospel is still spreading today in the far reaches of our world.

[Transition] - So, throughout our series, we'll dig into the ancient story, and then we'll check in with the current story of the spreading flame of the gospel that has never and will never be extinguished! Turn in your Bibles to Acts 1.

Back story on Acts

The book of Acts was written by Luke, the same guy who wrote the Gospel of Luke. Acts is literally Luke: The Sequel. Luke was a physician and a well-educated guy in Jewish as well as Greek language and culture. Luke completed this sequel to his gospel in the later part of the 1st

Century, somewhere in the 69-96 range of years. In terms of recording history, this is very soon after the events.

Luke gives us the eyewitness account of the life and teaching of Jesus and follows up with a highly historically accurate account of what occurred in the early years after Jesus rose from the grave. The account Luke gives us in the book of Acts covers the first 30 years of the spread of the Gospel—the good news of Jesus, and the development and expansion of the church.

Though the book of Acts is ancient history, it has amazing relevance for us today. The cultural climate was fairly similar to our cultural climate today. Christianity at the time of Luke's writing of Acts was the object of widespread suspicion and considered by those on the outside looking in to be a subversive movement, a radical movement, a menace to imperial law and order. Sound familiar? I've heard in the last few years Christianity being described in terms of extremism.

From the culture's perspective in Acts, Christianity's founder had admittedly been condemned to death by a Roman governor on a charge of sedition/insurrection. And wherever Christianity spread it seemed to bring a fair amount of turmoil and it seemed to always upset the status quo. Luke wrote the book of Acts, many say, to try and address these CONCERNS. (Bruce, The Book of Acts, p. 8)

What's more, Luke describes for us the establishment, mission, and expansion of the church which we continue to carry out today here at Foothills Church and beyond. And I am excited about how the book of Acts can speak into our ongoing development and expansion as we continue to fulfill that same mission empowered by the same God that empowered the infant church we will discover in Acts.

Acts will serve to instruct us and cause us to check our coordinates and direction overall as a church. Are we doing what God wants us to be doing? At the same time, it will instruct us as individuals in the church. Am

I doing what I should be doing? Are you doing what you should be doing? Beginning this morning and continuing through the next several months we go on an educational and inspirational inspection of the earliest forms and functions of the church.

Here's why this won't be boring. This church that is beginning in Acts... and the church that continues today and the church of which we are a part and developing here in the foothills...it is the hope of the world! I don't think it's ever been more clear...government, politicians, and policies are not going to be our savior. Those things can't fix us, our state, our nation, our world.

But, Jesus working in and through his church, is the hope of the world! Friends...don't get fuzzy...We have what the world needs! We have the person of God and the truth of God that sets people free to thrive and live meaningful fulfilling lives.

Let's continue to discover together how we can best deliver that Person and that truth. And as I said, we're going to refresh ourselves in the ancient story of the Gospel's spread...and we're going to be hearing the reports of our missionaries around the world about the ways that is still happening today.

[Transition] - Luke picks up his account in Acts where he left off in Luke and he fills us in on what Jesus and the earliest Christians were doing in the immediate days after his resurrection, after Easter what were they doing? Let's begin our study by looking at the opening verses of Acts 1:1-3

Jesus proved he was alive (Acts 1:1-3)

Friends...we are not spreading news about a good teacher or a spiritual leader who sacrificed his life and died and stayed dead. Ours is not a dead truth. He's a living savior and his word is living and active and powerful to transform lives.

Luke is proving the point; Jesus was going around making appearances proving that he was alive. In the gospel accounts we learn that he walked among them, talked with them, and ate with them...all to demonstrate beyond any shadow of doubt that he was alive.

Paul recounts these appearances in his letter to the Corinthians. He writes, *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born"* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

In our text today Luke tells us that Jesus continued to teach them about *"The Kingdom of God."* This is the same phrased used repeatedly in the gospel accounts indicating that Jesus continued to reinforce the things he had already been teaching.

[Transition] - Now, during this period of 40 days Luke tells us that Jesus reinforces for them two very important truths. Let's look at them. Look at verses 4-8 with me.

Jesus gave two final instructions (Acts 1:4-8).

Now, this was not the first time they had heard about this gift of the Holy Spirit promised by God the Father. Numerous times Jesus taught the Holy Spirit would come after he left (John 14-16). And since he was coming back around to this topic, the disciples must have felt that the time for Jesus to leave them was getting closer.

But it's obvious that even now, after all that's happened, they are still hanging onto the notion that Jesus was going to overthrow Roman domination and restore Jewish independence. But Jesus reminds them that the day and hour of that was entirely up to God the Father.

[**Transition**] - Notice...they don't get a time or date like they requested... instead they get two final instructions: They get their **assignment** as his followers...and the **promise** of power to complete it. First, the assignment, "...you will be my witnesses."

- ***The followers of Jesus are to be his witnesses.***

This is the fundamental assignment of every believer, and every gathering of believers called the Church. This is a calling directly from Jesus. Those who are believers, those who are Christians are to tell the story of Christ. They are to love him, follow him and represent him with their lips and their lives.

This calling is on the life of every believer regardless of your vocation, your location, your life station, or where you vacation...you are witnesses wherever you go.

Jesus is saying your life is to be a witness to the truth that Jesus is the real deal and this witness is to spread throughout the entire world. We are to witness to the truth of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as individual believers in the orbits of our lives...wherever God takes us...and we, as a church family are to do it corporately wherever God leads us.

[**Transition**] - But there's a catch. There is no way you can do it...there is no way that you and I can complete this assignment. There is no way that we can live out the Christian life and be effective witnesses for Jesus without the other truth Jesus reminds them of in these verses: You can't do it without the power source to carry out, the Holy Spirit.

- ***Our power source to carry out our call is the Holy Spirit.***

The Holy Spirit is the power that will make this calling doable. Notice how crucial it is. Look again at verse 4. Jesus basically says, "Don't even think about leaving Jerusalem until you receive the Holy Spirit." *It's because the Holy Spirit is the active agent to empower us to effectively fulfill God's call for our lives.* Jesus said, "You will receive power when the

Holy Spirit comes upon you..." That word power is the Greek word "dynamis."

[Illustration] - The Greek word *dynamis* entered the English language when the Swedish chemist and engineer Alfred Bernhard Nobel made the discovery that became his fortune. He discovered a power stronger than anything the world had known up to that time. He asked a friend of his who was a Greek scholar what the word for "explosive power" was in Greek. His friend answered, "*Dynamis*." Nobel said, "Well, I am going to call my discovery by that name." So he called his explosive power "dynamite." That is the word here.

And it refers not to the power one has by intrinsic or even by a delegated authority, though these are important kinds of power. It refers to the explosive, life-changing dynamic power of the Holy Spirit operating through the proclamation of the gospel. This is not power ginned up in yourself. It is not political power. This is power that flows directly from God. (Boice, Acts, p. 24)

It is this power of God that is available through the Holy Spirit that is the basis for the incredible potential of the church. It is the source of real change and transformation. It is the reason Jesus said about the Church, "the gates of hell will not prevail against it." We are his witnesses...we are to tell the story...we are to take the message to everyone who God brings us into relationship.

The Holy Spirit was the power source that would enable their witness to be effective and that enabled them to complete their part of the assignment to complete the great commission. And it remains our power source as well.

[Illustration] - Last week Michael Brill shared a story about how there was so much stacked against them: Brand new to the area, covid lock down, 90 ethnic people groups all hived off from each other, over 100 dialects, and the odds against them breaking into that area kept stacking up. Then "out of the blue" ...that's code for Holy Spirit...they get a call and an NGO

asks them if they would mind doing all their mentoring for them. Guys! That's the power of the Holy Spirit breaking down barriers, and overcoming obstacles. That's the power of the Holy Spirit keeping the fire of the gospel burning.

So, our success is guaranteed. We will prevail according to God's own word... "not by might, not by power, but by my spirit says the Lord!" These were the very words God spoke to Zerubbabel, who was called by God to rebuild the temple, an impossible task for a man like him with no political clout. But God's promise to him assured him of the Holy Spirit's divine ability to get it done through him (Zech. 4.6).

[Transition] - After proving he was alive, and giving his followers two critical instructions, Jesus leaves with a promise to return. Look at verses 9-11)

Jesus left with a promise to return (Acts 1:9-11)

I love this scene. Can't you just picture it? Jesus hugs them all, says his goodbyes, and then just ascends into the sky until he's hidden by some clouds. Incredible right? I'm thinking they were stunned, blinking hard, and rubbing their eyes wondering if their wine had gone bad at home and it was messing with their brains.

Then suddenly, two men dressed in white appear, angels presumably, and they give them...and us...this amazing promise. *"This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

As many of his parables taught, Jesus is like an owner who entrusts his business to his managers and servants, tells them what to do and how to do it while he's gone, assuring them he WILL COME BACK. There is a kind of assurance in these words. And a kind of accountability as well.

He gives us his mission...here's what I want you to do. And he gives us the key to empowerment for the mission...the Holy Spirit will fill you and empower you. And he promises his return to finalize the mission.

In John 14, Jesus told his followers, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* - John 14:1-2

This is our hope friends...this is our assurance. And as we wait for Jesus to return, we have a mission, a calling, an assignment from Jesus himself—Be my witnesses. Tell my story to whoever you can...wherever you go...to your neighbors...to the nations.

In this series in Acts we're going to see how that little band of believers took Jesus at his word. They waited and they received the power of the Holy Spirit and that flame of the gospel ignited and began to spread from Jerusalem to Judea, into Samaria and then to Caesarea, to Antioch...then to Ephesus and Colossae. That flame burned on to Corinth and Athens, and then to Thessalonica and Philippi. And finally, to Rome.

Conversation after conversation...synagogue after synagogue...public square after public square, despite desperate efforts to stamp out the flame, the gospel fire spread on and on and on. And it spread throughout Europe and Africa and eventually to the New World. Over the centuries it burned on and nothing could extinguish it.

Someone told someone, and they told someone else. And someone told you. And someone told me. And someone told the Brills. And now it's our time!

- It's our time to step up and fulfill Christ's mission in the world.
- It's our time to tell the story of Jesus in our lives.

- It's our time to spread the flame of the gospel.
- It's our time to tell the story of Jesus love, his mercy and grace, his willingness to forgive and to heal and restore.

It's our time to do this with children, students, and adults. In our worship gatherings, in our small group gatherings, at our retreats, and camps. And it's our time to do this in our neighborhoods, in coffee shops, on the golf course, and in the workplace. We must keep fanning the flame of the gospel.

And the flame spreads on...our little local church here in Cameron Park–Foothills Church–is connected to the global movement called *The Alliance*.

Many of you are aware, our church is part of a global Christian movement called the Alliance. One of the best ways to understand what the Alliance is, is to remember it is: A Christ-Centered Acts 1:8 family - The Alliance.

- **Christ-Centered**- means exactly what it sounds like. It's all about Jesus. We refuse to get distracted by doctrinal disputes. It's all about Jesus. All of Jesus for all of the person. He is our savior, our sanctifier, our healer, and our coming king.
- **Acts 1:8**- comes from our text today. It means all that we put our heads and hearts to must be Holy Spirit empowered. From conversion...to growth and sanctification, from evangelism to service in neighborhoods or nations...it's all driven by and empowered by the Holy Spirit. As individuals and as a church we must seek to open all the sails of our lives and invite the Holy Spirit to fill them and drive us forward.
- **Family** - We do this together in the context of loving, supportive relationship.

The Alliance here in the U.S is made up of over 400,000 worshipers in nearly 2000 churches, exalting Jesus in 38 languages and dialects.

We fan the flame of the gospel through our support of 722 international workers like the Brills, serving among 150 people groups in more than 140 cities.

And the flame spreads on...our U.S Alliance family partners with the Alliance World Fellowship—a global family of 55 autonomous national church networks consisting of 24,000 churches in more than 88 countries with more than 6.2 million “Alliance” worshipers.¹

Over the next several months we’re going to study and celebrate this spreading flame of the gospel in the ancient text of Acts. And we’re going to check in and celebrate this spreading flame in the present with several of our international workers from the Alliance. God is still on the move...and the Holy Spirit is still filling and empowering the spread of the gospel as the church is built one life at a time.

What’s your personal part in this mission? How’s God calling you to fan the flame of the spread of the gospel?

Students/ Young Adults...what’s God calling you to do with your life? Is he nudging you to answer the call to serve the nations or the neighborhoods of our nation?

Adults...are you fanning the flame of the gospel by telling the story of Jesus to those in your orbit of life?

Who are you praying for to open their hearts to Jesus? A neighbor? Co-worker? Friend?

Are you asking God to fill you with his Spirit to empower you just like he did these early believers so that you can be one of his witnesses?

A few weeks ago the Gideons challenged us, to give away a New Testament and last week The Brills’ challenged us to ask God for

¹ Stats from Alliance Life Special Issue August of 2022. 22-23.

awareness of who he wants us to share our story of Jesus so we can connect them to Jesus, or who he might want us to coach or mentor so they can grow to love and serve him in a deeper way.

So, I end with that challenge again today...whose face do you see?
Whose life has God brought into your orbit?

Be strong and courageous...the Holy Spirit is with you.