

Explore the Bible Series for June 1: Empowered to witness

May 27, 2008

• Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-6, 37-41

As Christian believers, we have great news to share and a commission from God to share it with everyone. It is the news that there is hope and deep meaning and purpose in life through surrendering our life to the lordship of Jesus. It is the only message anyone could hear which has eternal significance.

Yet while most believers can willingly, or even eagerly, tell others about what is going on at their church, many simply find it very difficult to share the Good News of salvation with their friends and neighbors who do not attend church. There are perhaps a number of reasons for this, such as fear, uncertainty or insecurity. Yet whether it is a lack of motivation or a lack of knowledge, the solution would seem to be a supernatural intervention to empower us to be a vocal witness to what Jesus has done for us.

As we begin a new series on the book of Acts, we will see such divine assistance is indeed available. The early believers certainly had reason to keep their new faith a secret. State and temple officials could have had them imprisoned or executed. Yet with the power they received through the Holy Spirit, they boldly proclaimed the gospel and forever set the model for divinely empowered witnessing.

We need power (Acts 1:4-8)

It had been 40 days since Jesus had been raised from the dead, and the disciples perhaps had begun to expect he always would be with them. Jesus, however, knew he would be returning to heaven, leaving them (and us) with the task of spreading the message and building God's church. He also knew the fear and uncertainty which the mission would create. He therefore gathered them together before he ascended in order to reassure them that divine help would come.

As they gathered, the expectations and insecurities of the disciples were apparent in their anxious questioning of Jesus. Concern over Roman reaction led them to ask if Jesus would finally establish his kingdom on earth. Although he did not give the answer they likely had hoped for, Jesus did address their need for divine help.

Today as well, many focus much of their mental strength concerned about whether today is the day Christ will return, perhaps because of feelings of fear or inadequacy for the mission. God wants us to know we can rest knowing he understands and has the answer for our need for power.

We can have power (Acts 2:1-4)

Just as they had following the crucifixion, the disciples gathered together in a private place. It seems they were both hiding and waiting for something to happen. Jesus said help would come, but they were unsure what form that assistance would take.

Suddenly they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind. It was such an overwhelming sound it seemed to fill the house. They then saw what they could only describe as tongues of fire which divided and settled on each person present. Immediately they sensed the power of the Holy Spirit and began to boldly proclaim the gospel. Notice the Spirit not only motivated them to leave the house and go into the streets of the city with the message

despite any possible reactions, it was also the Spirit which gave them the words to say. The promised help had arrived. This same Spirit which descended at Pentacost, is promised to every believer throughout all generations.

If we wrestle with fear, the Spirit will embolden us. If we question our ability to proclaim the message, the Spirit will give us the words to say. It is indeed part of the message we proclaim; whatever the need, we can have the power to overcome it.

We can use power (Acts 2:5-6)

Having received the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, the disciples went into the streets of Jerusalem sharing the gospel with everyone they encountered. As they did so, the full measure of the Spirit's power was revealed.

Due to the religious festival of Pentacost, the city was full of Jews from all over the Roman Empire, representing many different nationalities and languages. Yet as the disciples began to share, each person heard the gospel in his or her own language. The Spirit not only gave them the courage and power to be witnesses, he also did through them something beyond their own abilities; something for which only God could get credit. But it only happened as they took their new-found power and put it to use.

Today, we also have access to this power. The same Spirit lives in us to make us effective witnesses. But it only happens when we allow that power to flow throughout our lives and use it by sharing the Good News. When we tap into that power supply, we will find God truly does exceedingly more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

We can see power at work (Acts 2:37-41)

As word spread of this miraculous event, a crowd began to gather around the disciples. As it did, the Spirit again moved and prompted Peter, the man who had once denied even knowing Jesus, to stand and preach the first “Christian” sermon. For some of the other disciples, the sight of Peter boldly proclaiming the Jesus to such a large mixed crowd may have been evidence in itself of the work of the Spirit.

If that was not evidence, what happened next was clear visible proof of the supernatural work of God as 3,000 people became new believers. Although we face a variety of emotions as we seek to live as faithful followers of Christ, God has promised he will never leave us to face them alone. As we each seek to be witnesses of what we have experienced, we can access an infinite supply of power for the task. As we release it by stepping out and sharing the gospel, we are allowed to witness what boundless power can do. And that experience then becomes another part of our testimony to the power of God.