

Acts 1:8 – Power to be His Witness

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December 1, 2019

For about 15 years two things have been very consistent here on the first Sunday after Thanksgiving. Every year on the first Sunday after Thanksgiving for last decade and a half, we have begun our celebration of Jesus coming into this world. And we have begun our challenge of us going to the world with good news. Today, one of those is different. It is noticeable, perhaps, especially here in the Life Building, that this room is not decorated for Christmas and the songs are not filled with lyrics of Christmas music. There's a very significant reason for that. We are two weeks away from beginning worship in our new worship center, and on December 15th we will gather in our new worship center and kick off our celebration of Christmas together with the rooms decorated and the music filled with the songs of Christmas. It's an exciting time to look forward to that day. Our service times on December the 15th will be 9:00 AM and 10:30 AM. This will give us a little more time in each worship service and a little more time between services to help people get on and off of the property as well as have more time to just visit together and fellowship together as church family. So December the 15th is a big day for us and I look forward to being in that worship center together. Now, if you need a head start on our Christmas celebration, next Sunday evening we'll gather here for our annual Christmas Carol sing-a-long and cookies. So bring some cookies with you and come next Sunday evening and we'll sing together the songs of Christmas. All day next week, Sunday morning, Sunday evening, when we're here the new space will be open. It'll give us a chance to begin to get acclimated to new entrances and check-in areas where the bathrooms are and where the worship room is. I want to encourage you to walk through there next Sunday and visit and talk to each other and pray together. Pray in that room as you walk around that room for what God would do in the years to come in that space where we will gather.

That's coming December 15th. There's one thing today though that is the same that we do each year on the Sunday after Thanksgiving is to begin together to challenge ourselves to going to the world with this good news of Jesus Christ that we celebrate during the months of December, January and February. We give a special offering that's over and above our regular gifts, our regular giving and tithes, and we call it our Acts 1:8 offering. If you've been here for a few years, you might be familiar with Acts 1:8. Some of you've come for the first time today, or you've come in the last 12 months and I want to make sure that we're all on the same page in what we're talking about when we're talking about Acts 1:8. We do some things together as a local church with 47,000 other churches across the US. We are apart of the Southern Baptist Convention. Probably the time that we talk most about that is when we're talking about missions strategy, giving, going and reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus. I believe in our Southern Baptist convention that we have the best strategy, the most effective strategy that we can have by doing something together in our giving and our going. We give a portion of our Acts 1:8 offering to the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. We give a portion of it to the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and then we give a portion of the Acts 1:8 offering in order to help people from our congregation be able to go on short term projects throughout the year. So it's divided up in three areas.

Some history is wrapped up in our Acts 1:8 offering. Historically, Southern Baptist have given to an offering called the Lottie Moon Christmas offering for international missions. It's monies that are given over and above anything else that's given to missions and goes directly to support the life and ministry of missionaries that are serving as a career in other cultures. Last year, 47,000 Southern Baptist churches together gave \$157,300,000 to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering for international missions.

\$157,300,000. Now, it is the largest missionary offering that is given around the globe, and it's a combined offering. Our monies that we gave last year, half of what we give to Acts 1:8 goes to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, and again that Lottie Moon Christmas offering then supports about 4,000 career missionaries that serve in international cultures. You received today this Sunday paper and it highlights what is going on internationally for us and it puts some faces that we know as a church family that are serving through the sending agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. These families are inside the bulletin, here, you see a picture of Andy and Stephanie Reed, and Stephanie, and Todd and Deborah. They are serving in three different countries. Serving in East Asia, Italy and Madagascar. All former members of our church that have answered the call to go now live with their families in another part of the world, another language. Two college students that came through here and then now are serving for two years with a journeyman program, Rachel Tinney and Micah, serving in two different parts of the world. Our gifts, half of what we give to Acts 1:8, helps support missionaries like those that you see here on this page.

Now, a fourth of that Acts 1:8 offering goes to the North American Mission Board. That's the state side sending agency for the 47,000 Southern Baptist churches. When a person believes God has called them to go to some city or state in the U.S or Canada where there's not a church there to support them, they can go through the North American Mission Board, be appointed by them, and our gifts through our offerings help support them and put them on the field. It provides for their livelihood and their support. There are about 5,000 North American Mission Board missionaries serving in the U.S and Canada. Last year, Southern Baptist churches gave the largest offering ever in the history of Southern Baptists for state side missions. The home mission offering, the North American Mission board offering, we gave \$61.4 million. So \$157.3 million to international missions and \$61.4 million to stateside missions. You see what a difference 47,000 churches can have when we pool our resources together. Almost 10,000 missionaries serving, having their livelihood provided because churches like ours at this time of the year give to make it possible for them to go. It's amazing.

About 95%, maybe close to 98% of the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention are smaller than our church. Our church size would put us in the top 3% in size of all Southern Baptist churches, and to much who has been given, much as expected. If you did an average on this and you said, well, 157 million, that's about maybe \$3,000 a church. We can't do average. We have to do more. We have to cover for many that are not able to do as much as we can do. I want to put before you this year a goal to give, over January, February and March, \$200,000 to go to our Acts 1:8 missions offering. Two years ago we exceeded \$200,000 in our giving. Last year we gave just over \$120,000. I believe this year the need is great. The people are ready to go and God has positioned us to be able to give our best offering that we've ever given to reach the nations with the good news of Jesus Christ. I want to ask you on a challenge, and I want to urge you to pray about what God would have you to give as an individual or as a family in December, January, and February. Would you give your best Christmas gift to the cause of Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ going to the world.

When we think about our Acts 1:8 offering, it is built and based on a particular verse, Acts 1:8. Maybe you know that verse by heart, but lets open our Bibles and look at it. Acts 1:8 is the commission of Christ to his disciples before he ascended to heaven. Don't forget, he's been crucified. He's been buried. He's risen from the dead and he's alive and he's seen and he's visible and he's speaking. He's teaching, he's preaching, he's commissioning, and then he will ascend to heaven. For about 40 days, he was here on this earth after his resurrection. We have recorded different accounts of words that Jesus spoke, and on one occasion, just right before he's ascended, verse eight, "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. And when he had said these things as they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold two men

stood by them in white robes and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"

So just prior to Jesus leaving and ascending to heaven, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go. Well, there are a lot of you in this room today that could preach this message. Carla, you probably know it by heart. A lot of you grew up, you know who Lottie Moon is. You've probably dressed up like Lottie Moon at some point along the way. You know who Annie Armstrong is. People joke and they say, "Are we ever going to pay off Lottie Moon? I mean, what's going on with that?" The question might be, will we ever fulfill the Great Commission? "Pastor, every year about this time, it's predictable. You're talking about missions, you're talking about giving, going, praying." Will we ever fulfill the Great Commission? Will we ever fulfill Acts 1:8? Can I say to you today with absolute confidence: yes, we will.

How do you know? Because the book of Revelation tells us so. The book of Revelation tells us that every tongue, tribe and nation will be represented around the throne of God. Friends, there are nations and tribes and tongues and languages that have not heard the gospel. When our team arrived in Nepal and found the Bing people, they spoke to people that did not know the name of Jesus. They did not know how to be saved. They did not know how to have a relationship with the Almighty God. They did not know how to go to heaven. And that story can be repeated multiple times over. Still in our world, there is still work to be done, but it is a work that will be done. You missed a good chance to say amen right there. But there are obstacles, there are obstacles and that's why there are still unreached people. That's why there are still places in the United States. Do you know that the city of Boston is less than 3% evangelical? That's such a general term that's just saying that, best you can tell, when you do surveys that less than 3% of the people claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In America.

There's work to be done in our Jerusalem, in our Judea, in our Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. There are obstacles that we deal with every day, big obstacles. Obstacles that have kept the Great Commission from being fulfilled. Let me just mention some of those to you. The number one obstacle, perhaps, for the gospel going to the world is fear. Fear. Just scared, intimidated. We get fearful of the commission that we've been given, and it might be in an encounter with a family member or a friend or a neighbor or in another culture. Fear of going to another culture, fear of going to another state, fear of getting on a plane or fear of hiking a trail or fear of walking across the street or fear of talking across the lunch room table. We get scared, and it's not new with our generation, it goes all the way back to the disciples. When Jesus was approaching the cross, you see that the story is that the disciples scattered. Peter himself denied that he knew Jesus three times. Fear is real. It's a powerful obstacle for us in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. We deal with it day by day by day, still today.

A second obstacle are distractions. Distractions are an obstacle for us. We get busy, we get sidetracked. We let minor things become major things. We have no margin in our life for conversation. We're distracted by the cares of the world and the riches of the world and the concerns of the world. It happened with the disciples. Just prior to this statement that you will receive power and you'll be my witnesses, Jesus is speaking with the disciples as the risen Savior about to ascend to heaven, and it says that, "When they had come together", it reads like just moments before he ascended. "So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?'" Still at this time they are looking for a political kingdom, a King to take the throne, a King that would restore Israel to a place of authority and prominence. And listen to Jesus's answer. "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the father has fixed by his own authority.'" And look where he turns the conversation then he says, "But you will receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses."

Jesus is saying to the disciples, there are some things that you don't know. There are some things that you won't be able to know. There are some things that you don't need to know. There are some things that are the father's business and there are some things that are your business, and the father's business is times and seasons when he will restore. Our business is to go and be a witness for Jesus Christ to the world. That that is a major obstacle for us over and over again as a church family and as individuals, That we began to get the minor things in the category of the major things instead of keeping the main thing the main thing. Jesus says be my witnesses.

Number three, another obstacle would be spiritual forces. When we are sharing the gospel, when we're taking the good news of Jesus Christ to the world, we're not playing in sandboxes. This is not Tonka truck territory. When we're taking the gospel to the world, we are combating, not flesh and blood, we are combating the spiritual forces of this dark world. That's why the Bible tells us about our spiritual armor and the weapons of our warfare. Corinthians says that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty through God in the pulling down of strongholds and taking every thought captive. They're weapons. They're not weapons of the flesh. We don't go into countries and cultures with guns and knives and weapons and bombs to share the good news of Jesus Christ. That's not our battle. That's not our strategy. That's not our call. Our call is to find a spiritual battle, a spiritual warfare. Paul tells us in Ephesians to clothe ourselves with what? Spiritual armor, spiritual armor. And when you and I go to our families or our friends, our neighbors, and our brow breaks out in a sweat, our heart begins to raise. Our hands began to sweat. And we're thinking about all the reasons and excuses not to share the gospel with someone. Friends, the spiritual battle is on. The war is raging and the enemy comes to kill and steal and destroy, but Jesus comes to give life. And the enemy does everything he can to hinder and interfere with this abundant eternal life coming to a soul. He may work through governments and he may work through schemes and strategies and he may work through economic systems. Don't miss the fact that when you and I are going to the world and going to the nations, that one of the hindrances, one of the obstacles is that we are up against an enemy and he seeks, he roams. He roams around seeking whom he may devour. It's an obstacle that we're up against.

There's a fourth one, and that's soil conditions. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us the parable of the sower and when the seed of the gospel is sown, when the seed of the gospel is spread into the hearts and lives of men and women and boys and girls, the Bible teaches us that there are different soils. There are different hearts. It's received differently and some falls on good soil. Some falls and sprouts where doesn't take root, some is choked out. Some falls on hard soil and never germinates. It's true in our families that some hearts in our families have different soils. It's true in our community, some hearts have different soil. It's true in our nation, some cities receive the gospel more readily than other places. It's true in our world that some countries right now are demonstrating, exhibiting good soil places.

Here's a thing that's going on in our world right now, because of security reasons, the most supernatural, phenomenal response to the gospel right now is coming in places that we cannot speak of. When you can get one on one with someone that's just speaking by voice where it's not out there, the reports blow your mind. There are places today that might appear as hard soil, but the gospel is taking root and lives are being changed.

There are obstacles. A fifth one is inadequacy. We've all said it. "I don't know what to say." "I don't have a dramatic story. The worst thing I ever did was steal a gummy bear. I just don't have much." You've got a story. Maybe your story is the sins that Jesus saved you from committing. Maybe the story is what Jesus saved you from, what not be in your future. We feel inadequate, we say, "I don't know what to say. I don't have an outline. I only know one verse of scripture. I'll lead somebody down a road and he'll never come back." Inadequacy. We feel it, we wrestle with it. "I'm just going to leave that to the professionals." "I'm just gonna leave that to the trained." And we put off sharing the gospel with our own

mission field that God's placed to see in. You think, "I could never go." "God couldn't use me in another country." Oh, yes he could. "I'm too old." No, you're not. "I'm too young." No, you're not. "I'm not smart enough." Yes you are. "There's more important things for me to do." No, there's not. The most important thing in your life to do today would be for you to be obedient to the spirit of God in your life and obey his call. Don't let the enemy convince that you're inadequate. Or maybe let him. And then acknowledge that Jesus Christ is your adequacy.

There is a sixth obstacle for us and that's prayerlessness. Prayerlessness. One of the obstacles for us reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ is being an un-praying people. Prayerlessness demonstrates a lack of God-dependence. Prayerlessness demonstrates a lack of burden. Prayerlessness demonstrates a taken for granted the salvation that we've received. Do you know the book of Acts, what it really is is a prayer journal? It's really a prayer journal. Chapter after chapter after chapter, the consistent word in the 28 chapters is, "They prayed." "They were praying together." "And then they prayed." "And once they had prayed." "And they were all together praying." It's over and over and over again. It's a prayer journal, and for you and I to see the movement of God like it was seen in the book of Acts, you and I have to become a praying people. We have to take this need to the Lord and take the souls of mankind to the Lord and wage war on our knees in prayer.

It's so true about our story of what we're seeing happen in Nepal. The answers to prayers. Think about it, three years ago we began praying, Lord give us an unreached people group. Then we identify the Bing people, and we're praying about how we can get to the Bing people. We have contacts that come out of nowhere. We wind up in Nepal. Millions of people are trying to find the Bing people and we find one person. There's an open door because of a once in a lifetime tornado that comes through, and they thought we were relief workers, and our team was received into this area. One man is encountered and when the story from the book is told and shared, he said, "I've heard some of that and today, now, I believe." And they go back three, four, five months later, and there's that same man, but this time he's got two and three others that have believed with him. The missionaries on the ground are saying to us, not who trained y'all? Not, where'd you get your education? Not, who's funding you? It's, who's praying for you? Who's praying, who's behind this? This only happens because of prayer. You don't see this kind of movement in these people without somebody praying. A great obstacle for us to continue to see the gospel of Jesus Christ going forward would be prayerlessness. We must be a prayer filled people, a prayerful people if we want to see the kingdom advance.

You can track it. As a church becomes more active and passionate and burdened for prayer, you will see a burden in the passion for evangelism rise at the same time. Because as you seek the heart of God, you get to know the heart of God and you find out that the heart of God is for others to know the heart of God. As you pray and seek the heart of God, you want more people to know the heart of God and it just tracks together as you pray and seek the Lord, to have an increased burden for others knowing this same God. Fear, distractions, spiritual forces, soil conditions, inadequacy, prayerlessness. How do we overcome these obstacles? There's one word, power. Power.

Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and savior? I'm asking. Do you know him? Going to heaven, believe by faith that Jesus Christ died for you. Say amen. Now, here's the news. With that, you have power. You have power. Power greater than what powers these lights in this room. It's the kind of power that raises the dead to life. It's the kind of power that gave you a new heart. It's the kind of power that raised Jesus back to life. It is the kind of power that took him to heaven. It is the kind of power that will bring him back. It is the power that spoke creation into existence. It is the power that breathed life into your lungs. It is the power, wonder, working power of God. In Acts 1:8, we know you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. How? There's so many obstacles. It's in the first part of the verse. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon

you." The disciples, they receive that power. Listen, the disciples received that power, the spirit of God came upon them. Now, when does the spirit of God come upon you? The spirit of God comes upon you when you believe that Jesus Christ has saved you. When you trust him by faith, the spirit of God comes to live in you.

Ephesians chapter one says, "This inheritance has been deposited into you and it has been marked with the seal of the Holy spirit." Romans chapter five says that, "The same power that raised Jesus back from the dead now lives in you." The spirit of life. He lives at you. So three things about this power. Number one, this power that we have is the person of God in us. If we can get out of our Sunday morning Watkinsville law, and let that somehow, by his spirit resonating in our heart, that this power is the person of God in us. In us. The Holy spirit, part of the Godhead, God the father, God the son, God the spirit. The Holy spirit is not an "it." The Holy spirit is not the "it- factor" in a person. The Holy spirit is not a thing. The Holy spirit is not a force. The Holy spirit is not a vibe. The Holy spirit is not a feeling. The Holy spirit is not a what. The Holy spirit is a who. The Holy spirit, who is he is? He is the person of God in us. The Bible teaches that we are the temple of God and the spirit of God lives in that temple of our soul.

In a roundabout way, we learn that the spirit is the person of God in a sinful event in Acts chapter five. In Acts chapter five, you have Ananias and Sapphira. They have sold a piece of property and they kept back some of the money and they lied about what they'd sold the property for, and listen to what Peter said. Acts five verse three says, "but Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land. While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man, but to God.'" You've lied to God, right? Some people said, Holy spirit, you're right. Some people said, God, you're right. First Peter says, you've lied to the Holy spirit. Then Peter equates that with you've lied to God. The power of God in us is the person of God in us. So when we go against the obstacles of fear and distractions and an adequacy and spiritual forces, remember that the person of God lives in you.

Number two, the power of God is the presence of God with us. This power is the presence of God with us. This power and the Holy spirit, that is the person of God in us, but it's also the presence of God with us. John says in chapter 14, he speaks about the promise of the Holy spirit and then Jesus' own words. He says, John 14:15, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments and I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him for he dwells with you and will be in you." The person of God in us, the presence of God with us. You consider those obstacles like fear and inadequacy and spiritual forces and remember that as you fight against those obstacles, you are never alone. You're never alone. You don't go into spiritual battle alone. You don't go into that conversation alone. You don't go to another culture alone.

This morning in the first hour, Kimberly and JP who serve in Brazil. Kimberly, her maiden name was Burns. Kimberly was here. She stood before me, JP and Kimberly Battista and they are back here for a week from Brazil. With tears in her eyes she said, thank you. Thank you for the reminder, so far away from home, that God is with us. It's what we celebrate at Christmas. Emmanuel, God with us. You may be feeling very alone today. As a follower of Jesus Christ, don't you forget that you're never alone. The loneliest time I've ever been in my life was the summer of 84. I moved four hours from home, seemed like a long way to me. Lived by myself in a roach infested apartment that, praise the Lord, has since been demolished. I wish I had been able to grasp this glorious news that I was not alone. God with us.

We have a third thing, the power of God in us, the presence of God with us, and this power is the possibility of God before us. The book of Acts, "You will receive power when the Holy spirit comes upon you," and he did. They spoke in unknown languages to themselves and people from all around the globe understood what was being said because of the possibility of God. Then Peter stood and preached in boldness, when just days before he had been a coward. The possibilities of God. "3000 were added to their number that day." The possibilities of God. And then their number became 5,000, the possibilities of God. Then the believers were dispersed around the different countries and the word of God spread because of the possibilities of God. That word has spread and spread and spread, until today in Watkinsville, Georgia on December 1st, 2019 we're proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, the possibilities of God. And when the Holy spirit lives within us, what happens is that you and I become a living and breathing book of Acts, walking around on this globe with the absolute full possibilities of God living in us, with us, wanting to operate through us.

Listen, the power of God is in you, with you, and before you. How do we activate that? How do we activate that? Some of you've had the experience of going to the bank, maybe just say a child in this room today, and your parents put \$500 in the bank and said we're starting a bank account for you. So you go to the bank account there and \$500 is deposited and in a few days you'll receive your check card. So money's just sitting there. Three days later, the mail comes, you open it up and there's a plastic card. And on that plastic card is a little white sticker with black print on it, and what does it say? "In order to activate this card call this number." You call that number and it says your card is now activated. They didn't put money in there, it was already there, but you had to call someone and get permission and verify who you are, and now everything that is there is yours to spend.

How do we activate this power of God in our life? He's there. He's there. It's prayer. Prayer is the way we activate the power of God in our life. Ephesians one tells us that the Holy spirit has been deposited into us as a seal, marking us. Ephesians five tells us not to be drunk on wine, but be filled with the Holy spirit. How do we activate the Holy spirit in our life? It's prayer. It's you waking up in the morning and when your eyes pop open you are saying, "Father, I have resurrection power living in me. Help me to live today in light of that." "Father, I die to myself, but I live because Christ lives in me." "Father, I am crucified with Christ, yet I live." "Father, I can't do this on my own. Temptation's great and obstacles are strong. I don't know how to live for you. I can't do it on my own. In my weakness would you be strong? Spirit of God, would you live in me, through me." "Father, would the fruit of the spirit be evident in my life today as I walk through this life." It's us day by day by day by day, activating, going before God. I'm a child of yours. I'm a child of the King. You're my father. You saved me. You've put your spirit in me. I want to live today, not by flesh, but by your spirit. Today, if we're ever going to see the Great Commission fulfilled in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria are the ends of the Earth. You and I, we've got to take hold of that power. And it starts but just acknowledging to God that we need you. You fill me.

Father, today somehow, supernaturally, let us grasp the power that you've promised lives within us. I pray that we would be a people of prayer. You know what we need. I pray we would express to you what we need. I pray, Lord Jesus, our church would be a prayer filled church, a spirit filled church, a spirit led church, spirit controlled church. I pray individually that you would overcome the obstacles to sharing our faith. By your power, set free in us, day by day by day. In the great name of Jesus we pray. Amen.