

On Mission Together: *Power to be His Disciples*

We are in a series called On Mission Together for the past month, and we have been looking at the biblical truth that what God calls us to do as a church; He calls us to do *together*. I have shared before that I have this sense that the Lord has us poised for a new season of growth and fruitfulness, and that really excites me for two reasons. First because growth is really important to God and therefore it should be to us as well. One of the reoccurring markers of God's supernatural activity in the books of Acts is that the church increased and multiplied. Numbers are important to God because people are important to God and they are important to us as well. So I think it's right that we should pray with excitement for our numbers to grow. Not because we want to fill seats. Not because we want to count heads. But because we want to see people reached with the good news of Jesus Christ.

But the second reason that I am excited about what the next season holds for us is that we get to be a part of it together. Wednesday night at the youth meeting we sat outside around a fire and many of the teens shared how God was working in their lives. And several of them had the opportunity to go on mission trips or camps and work with others to share the gospel. And we all agreed that there is a special bond that happens when we roll up our sleeves and work with other believers for the kingdom of God.

That's how God designed it to work. Not only has God designed the church such that we can accomplish much more for His glory together than we ever could alone but He has also designed that the joy of serving the Lord is multiplied when we link arms and work together. Mission is not just about *what* God's called us to do, it's about *who* God's called us to do it with. God has called us together as a community of faith to accomplish His purposes for us, and that's exciting to me!

For the last three weeks we've been looking at how Jesus' disciples need to love one another. Love isn't optional equipment for the believer. This morning we're going to look at something else that Jesus says isn't optional equipment for the church, that is, the power of the Spirit. Turn with me to Acts 1. If God is bringing us into a new season of fruitfulness, it's going to take more than a new building. It's going to take more than skill or determination or a comprehensive strategy. It's going to take the empowering of the Spirit of God.

Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-4

I. The power of the Spirit is for every aspect of the Christian life

Jesus told his disciples to wait until they received power from the Holy Spirit. No ministry, no preaching, not even sharing the news that Jesus is risen - they were to do nothing except prayerful waiting *until* they received the Holy Spirit and power. So what is the power of the Spirit actually for? For what purpose is the power given and why do we need it?

When we read Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...* we might be inclined to answer that the power of the Spirit is power to be Jesus' witnesses. I have preached messages on that. And it's true as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough.

Jesus didn't say, *you will receive power to be my witnesses*, he said you will receive power when the Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses. The purpose of the power of the Spirit includes the power to stand up and be bold witnesses for Christ but it's more than that. The purpose of the power

of the Spirit includes exercising the spiritual gifts such as healing the sick, prophesying, and giving words of knowledge, but it's more than that. The purpose of the power of the Spirit includes the gift of the five fold ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, but it's more than that. So, ultimately what is the power of the Spirit for? Why is it given, why do we need it? I submit to you that Jesus said wait until you have received the Spirit and the power He gives because we need the power of the Spirit for every, single aspect of the Christian walk! There is nothing about our Christian walk that we can do without the empowering of the Spirit. Not just the big, outwardly spectacular things, but even the smallest and most private aspects of the Christian walk. To be disciples of Jesus Christ we need the power of the Spirit. Jesus knew that, and so he said, "wait".

After Janice and I bought our first home on Long Island, we got a self propelled lawn mower that was powered in two stages. Starting it up just got the blade spinning. But then you had to throw a second lever to get the self propelling feature to work. One day I came home to find Janice had mowed half the lawn. She had wanted to mow the whole lawn but told me when I got home that she was so exhausted after mowing half the lawn that she didn't have the strength to do the rest. Janice didn't realize that it was a self-propelled mower and she didn't throw the second switch so she pushed this very heavy lawn mower all by her own power. There was power available that she wasn't tapping into.

In a sense that's like our Christian walk and in a sense it's not. The Bible tells us we need power – Jesus tells us we need power. And there is always *more* power available than anyone of us is tapping into at any given time. So in that sense it's similar. But here's how its different. The Christian life isn't like that two stage powered mower, where you had the option of combining some of its power and your effort and get work done. The Christian life is more like the mower I own now. If it's not powered, its useless. It can do nothing unless you power it up. You can push it across the lawn – but it's not going to accomplish anything without power. *That* is what our Christian life is like. Without the power of the Spirit, we can do nothing. The power of the Spirit is more than the power to do this or that, it's the power of the life of Christ in us and it enables us to live every aspect of the Christian life.

So maybe there's someone in your life who is really hard to love and you realize that you need the power of the Spirit to love that person. That's true and that's a great prayer to pray! But the Bible tells us we need the Spirit's power just to know the love of Christ in our own hearts – much less to overflow with that love to others.

[14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19

We need power to love, we need power to know we're loved. We need power to lead someone to Christ, we need power to be patient with our spouse. We need power to be holy. We need power to be humble. We need power to handle the storms of life, and we need power to handle the joys of life. We need power to make godly and wise decisions. We need power to navigate interruptions and disappointments with faith and trust that God is in them.

The power of the Spirit doesn't just come on us to help us do something, like the Spirit would come upon Samson to enable him to do mighty feats. The power of the Spirit is working in us all the time to help us

be something, to *become* something – that is, like Christ. And by the Spirit’s work in us, we become his witness. Which doesn’t just mean to tell people about Jesus, it means our lives and our words combine to bear witness to people about who Jesus is and what he’s like and what he does with a life.

One of the dangers we need to be aware of when we talk about the church’s mission is getting in a project mindset. We can see evangelism as a project – leading someone to faith in Christ becomes more of a project than a lifestyle. We want to check off the fact that we witnessed to them off our task list. If they don’t respond the way we want them to, we check them off our list and move on. But people can tell the difference between when someone sees them as a project and when someone really cares about them. The church’s mission isn’t so much a project as it is a lifestyle. The disciples asked Jesus in Acts 1:6, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” That’s a project question and a political question. Lord, are you going to set up the geopolitical center of the world at this time and set up the kingdom of God on earth so that the nations live under the rule of God? Check, check, doublecheck.

Jesus said, the timing of that is not for you to know. But you will receive power from the Spirit and you will be my witnesses to the end of the earth. My kingdom will expand, not one voting district at a time, but one heart at a time by the power of the Spirit through your witness. It’s a glorious mission, but it’s not a project, it’s a lifestyle. A lifestyle powered by the Holy Spirit.

II. Christians grow in the power of the Spirit by “dependent communion” with the Spirit in every aspect of the Christian life

So how do we grow in the power of the Spirit? Well, if the power of the Spirit is given for every single aspect of our Christian walk, then we grow in the power of the Spirit as we depend on the Spirit for every aspect of our lives and commune with the Spirit in every moment of our lives. I’m going to call it “dependent communion”. Dependence describes our need to lean on the Spirit for our strength and communion describes our intimate relationship with the Spirit. No moment is too big, and no moment is too small. No event is too special, and no event is too mundane for us to need to commune with the Spirit and depend on the Spirit.

This is what we see in Jesus’ life. Although Jesus was (and is) God, he constantly relied on the Holy Spirit during his earthly ministry. Luke especially emphasizes the Spirit’s role in Jesus’ life. Before Jesus begins his earthly ministry he is baptized by the Spirit at the river Jordan (Luke 3) and then, full of the Holy Spirit, is compelled by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and be tempted by the devil. He emerges, Luke tells us, in the power of the Spirit and immediately begins preaching the kingdom of God. Shortly thereafter he is in his hometown of Nazareth when he stands up and opens the scroll and reads from Isaiah:

[18] “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19 ESV)
And then he goes on to say, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus was dependent on the Spirit for his ministry and for his direction. The Spirit led him, and he followed.

Direction and decisions

Dependent communion with the Spirit applies to every aspect of our lives, but I want to take a moment to apply it to one specific aspect of our lives this morning: decision making. When we need to make decisions, this is an area where we can often push things by our own power. This is my decision and I just have to make it, so let me compile all the information I can about it and then make a decision.

We do have to make decisions – we will be paralyzed if we don't, or if we always wait for “supernatural guidance” before we pull the trigger and make a decision. But I believe the Spirit wants us to make Him a bigger part of our decision making process. Ask the Spirit for guidance. Listen to the Spirit's voice; be open to His leading and guidance.

The Spirit directed Jesus into the wilderness. That wasn't something Jesus planned and the Spirit followed him, that was what the Spirit planned and Jesus followed the Spirit's leading. The Spirit spoke to Philip and directed him to talk to the Ethiopian eunuch. The Spirit spoke to Peter and told him he was to go with the three Gentiles that would soon be at his door. The Jerusalem council concluded that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them not to impose legalistic requirements on the Gentile believers. And Paul was directed constantly in his missionary journeys. The Spirit forbade him to go in certain directions, and he resolved in the Spirit to go in other directions.

On rare occasions the Spirit's leading might be unusual and even disruptive to our decision making process. But I believe most of the time it is a very natural and organic thing as we depend on and commune with the Spirit. He guides us with gentle internal impulses that could easily be confused with our own thoughts and impulses. Growing in our sensitivity, openness, faith, and obedience to the Spirit's leading, is a big part of our growing in our discipleship.

The Spirit uses disappointments

Funny, over the years I've found that often God's clearest direction has come through disappointment. Not sure why, but it's true. If you buy today's Star Gazette you'll find an article about GCC, and he writes about our wandering for 10 years without a home. The interview got me remembering how when I got the call from Suzy at C-PP school district saying we needed to leave Corning West and there were no great alternatives available, something rose up in me. I was discouraged. I was feeling at the end of my grace for meeting in schools. But as I drove around for the next two days looking for someplace for us to call home, as I searched the real estate listings, even in my desperation and discouragement I felt that God was working in it. I felt desperate to see things changed, but I also felt that God wanted to meet our need so there was faith in my desperation for change. Call it desperate faith. And after two days, as I was driving home from Corning, God brought this place to my mind, property that I had looked at 5 years previously, and I figured I'd just see whatever became of it. I drove over here expecting to find it fixed up and occupied, but it was clearly vacant and neglected. I was able to track down the owner even though it wasn't on any real estate listing and he offered it at a price that was almost half what he was asking when I first looked at it. Looking back it was clearly the Spirit guiding me, but I knew it was the Spirit of God even as it was going on – even though I could not see where it was going or how it would end.

Disappointments are often His appointments. Pray and listen for the Spirit's guidance. The Lord used persecution to scatter His church, and that was the means God used to lead Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch – one soul who came to Christ, but who knows how God used that Ethiopian to share Christ to countless others in Ethiopia? Often what seems like a setback is God's forward thrust into a new thing God has for you. So cultivate a dependent communion with the Holy Spirit. Ask God to fill you with the Spirit frequently and then pray, listen, and lean on the Spirit.

III. There is power in numbers!

Notice that Jesus called the disciples to wait and they interpreted that as waiting *together*. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on them they were all together in one place. The outpouring of the Spirit – the empowering of the Spirit – was a group thing. There is power in numbers!

On Mission Together
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God can use any one of us, and He desires to fill us individually, but there is a spiritual dynamic when the church is praying and waiting and working in one accord. The disciples were together in chapter 4 as they prayed and the place was shaken and they were all filled with the Spirit. There's power in numbers!

Cornelius gathered all his relatives and close friends and as they heard Peter preach Jesus the Spirit fell on them. In Acts 19 when Paul came upon a group of disciples who had never even heard of the Holy Spirit he prayed for them and the Spirit came upon them.

I am not promoting the teaching that we need to be together to be filled with the Spirit. The empowerment and filling of the Spirit is to be a daily thing in the life of the believer. What I am saying is that the Spirit delights in filling His people when they are together! The filling of the Spirit is often a group thing and the power of the Spirit is boosted in the lives of believers as we experience His grace and power together – there is power in numbers when God's people gather together and call upon Him for power.

GCC, I believe God has some pretty exciting days ahead for us, exciting because we will be seeing God's working in people's lives, and exciting because we get to do it together. There is a bond that is formed as we experience God's power together and are used for His glory together. Let's believe God for great things in the coming weeks, months, and years. Great things that we get to experience by His power. And together! Let's pray.