

April 14, 2024

“You Will Receive Power”

Acts 1:6-8

Intro:

In a recent conversation with Pastor Joel Russell-McLean over at First Baptist, we were discussing the current season in the church calendar. We are in the season known as Eastertide. Specifically, if you are following the lectionary readings, this is the third Sunday of Eastertide. Eastertide comprises the Sundays between Easter Sunday and Ascension Sunday, which is then followed by Pentecost Sunday. There are 40 days between Easter and Jesus’ Ascension, and then another 10 days after that to Pentecost.

I like to call these weeks, or this season, the “Hurry up and Wait” season of the church. My term is not as technical or spiritual as what one might find in the writings of the church fathers, or even as “properly church” as Joel and I might have come up with, but my thought is that in these 40 days, Jesus tells his disciples that something great is going to happen to and for them, but they are going to have to wait for it.

If we look in Acts 1, just a few verses earlier than what we have read this morning, we find Jesus instructing his disciples to “not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before.” – that’s in 1:4. In other words... hurry up and wait. Of course the disciples (probably led by Peter on this, but that is just a guess) are not particularly good at waiting, and Luke tells us that they kept asking “is it time yet?” (See verse 6.)

In all of this, I wonder why they were made to wait. We have no record of anything specific that Jesus did or taught during those days of waiting, other than a vague statement that he told them about the kingdom of God, which could be anything from what heaven is like to what God’s plan for creation and redemption is. The other thing we know from Scripture is that Jesus spent those days showing himself to people and proving repeatedly that he was actually alive.

I assume that this waiting period was intended to teach the disciples practices of patience, listening, being aware of what was going on amongst them and around them, and as mentioned, learning what it means to pray “your kingdom come”. Why those lessons particularly needed to be learned (that is, if my assumptions are even close to being correct), again we don’t know. Perhaps there is something about what the Spirit will bring that requires a such a period of preparation and readiness.

All of this leads to our sermon topic.

In verse 8, Jesus tells the disciples that even though no one but the Father knows the exact dates for the restoration of God’s people and ultimately all of creation, they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit soon, and when the Holy Spirit does come, they will receive power. This is great!

But power for what?

Power:

When we look at this passage, and when we think about power coming from Holy Spirit – divine power – we are most likely to translate that into mighty works of miracles being done by our hands. Things like healing, or speaking in tongues, or being able to discern what a person’s true intentions are, or things like that. And certainly those are legitimate experiences and manifestations of the power that comes from the Holy Spirit. They are in line with the spiritual gifts that the Apostle Paul talks about, and that Peter talks about, in their letters. In the book of Acts we find many accounts of Peter, or Paul, or one of the other disciples in the midst of powerful workings of the Holy Spirit – healing, miraculous escapes from prison, surviving shipwrecks and snake bites, and so on. With those passages and stories on our mind, it is only natural to think that is what Jesus means when he says you will receive power.

But there is more that we are missing. I want to expand your thinking on this a bit today. We like and look forward to having Power of the impressive kind. When we don't see strong evidence of that in our Christian lives, we question whether we have received the Holy Spirit at all. This line of thinking can erode our faith and act as a barrier to seeing the full power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Let's take a look at the bigger picture of this Spirit-given power, and what I believe Scripture tells us it is for.

Spiritual Gifts:

First off, we will talk about Spiritual Gifts. That is the easiest place for our minds to go, and so we must acknowledge them. I've already mentioned the more spectacular "manifestation gifts", but those are not the only ones in the biblical lists. 1 Peter 4 gives a short list of gifts, and 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Romans 12 cover what Paul has to say about gifts. If you were to look at all those lists side by side you would find things such as teaching and preaching, leadership, hospitality, giving, helps, and prayer of various types in addition to healing, speaking in tongues, and so on. I'm not going to cover all the various gifts listed, but I will mention that none of those lists are meant to be comprehensive. They are examples given so that when we each explore the areas in which the Holy Spirit might have gifted us, we will have something to work from in terms of how these gifts might manifest.

Interestingly enough, spiritual gifts such as the ones listed in those passages are not part of what Jesus is telling the disciples in Acts 1. So we will leave them for the moment and look more closely at that passage.

Power to Witness:

We often separate what Jesus says in Acts 1:8 into two disconnected thoughts. One thought is that we will receive power, and the completely unrelated thought is that we will be Jesus' witnesses, telling people everywhere about him. One has to do with power, the other with evangelism (another spiritual gift, by the way). But that isn't the case. Jesus isn't giving two separate thoughts, but one complete

thought. The power those disciples will receive, and the power that we receive, is the power to be a witness for Jesus. Nothing more and nothing less than that. Jesus doesn't say "and you will be my hands of healing, you will be my translators of strange languages, you will be my prophets". Those might be specific calls for certain individuals, but the general instruction for everyone is to be a witness for Jesus everywhere.

I know that many of us do not find this an easy task. Telling people about Jesus feels awkward. Showing people by living differently is easier, but inevitably it should lead to a conversation where we actually do need to say something. This is not second nature for many Christians. But it is what we are supposed to do. And so, the Holy Spirit comes to give us power in order to do that. Not power like a super power, but power such as confidence. Such as suddenly having words to say that we never knew we had. Power to have courage to risk opening ourselves up to someone else when we don't know how they will react. Power to recall the examples of God's powerful presence in our lives at just the right time to be shared.

So first and foremost, we have been given power to be Jesus' witnesses in the world.

Power to love and be disciplined:

There is one other aspect of this power that I want to touch on this morning. It is what we have already read from 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."

There are two things here to note. The power given is one of love and self-discipline. Loving others is not easy. Sure, it is easy to love people who reciprocate that love, or who we like, or who are safe and familiar. It is entirely something else to love those who are, to us, unlovely. That can cover a large spectrum, but if you take a moment you can probably think of examples specific to you. The power we receive gives us the capacity to love those people – to stop and listen

to them, to acknowledge them, to care for them, to champion them, to pray for them. This is the external power of the Spirit that is given to us.

The internal power is self-discipline. Living a faithful Christian life is not easy. And much of it is done without many, or even any, people witnessing it. It is easy to give up. To slack off. To not put our whole heart and soul and mind into loving God. The Holy Spirit gives power to push through the temptations to give up when it is hard. He gives power to pray when prayer seems hard. To read Scripture when our mind wanders, or our days are full of distraction. Being disciplined in the Christian life is not a matter of exercising our will, but of submitting our will to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:

So, power for what?

Power so that our lives, our active, visible, and present lives, will be witnesses of Jesus – of what he taught, of what he did while on Earth, and most importantly of who he is and why all of it matters.

My encouragement and challenge to you this morning is that when you think that you aren't able to speak to that person, or give time to that prayer, or use that spiritual gift, remember that it is not your power that does it – it is the power of the Holy Spirit which has been given to you. And that is all that power that we need.

Let's pray.