

Disciples Fulfillment of Promise

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Date: 01 October 1995

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[0 : 00] The text I've chosen to for this Worldwide Communion Sunday is the first few verses of the book of Acts. Acts 1, verses 1 through 11.

And if you are able, I would ask you to stand for the reading of God's Word. Hear the Word of God. So, the first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

To these, He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, which He said, You have heard from Me, for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

[1 : 13] So, when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, Lord, is it at this time that You are going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth.

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. As they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them and said to them, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?

Why? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven. Spirit of the living God, we believe that one day you worked with Luke, the physician, to write down these words, and to write them down for the whole church. And now we pray in your mercy and in your grace that you will take these words off the page and make them a living reality in our minds and hearts and spirits, for we pray it in Jesus' name and for His glory.

Amen. You may be seated. Forty days with the risen Jesus.

[3 : 02] Imagine what that experience must have been like. Forty days of intimate fellowship with the Savior of the world. Forty days of face-to-face fellowship with the head of the new human race.

Luke, the author of Acts, says that Jesus, during that period, presented Himself alive. Well, that's an intriguing line. Presented Himself alive.

What does that mean? Luke says, By many convincing proofs. What does that mean? What kinds of proofs? And speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God, I wish that I could have been part of that 40-day experience.

What was Jesus teaching them? Did He show them the relationship between His suffering and the kingdom of God? Did He show them the relationship between His resurrection and the kingdom of God?

Did He show them the relationship between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the kingdom of God? I wish I could have been there to hear that teaching. Why didn't any of those who were present during that 40 days write it down?

[4 : 22] Probably because the really important thing about those 40 days was the great promise Jesus made at the end of the 40 days.

Luke says that Jesus told the apostles to wait. To wait in Jerusalem for what He calls the promise of the Father. The promise of the Father.

And He explains, Which you have heard from Me, For John baptized with water, But you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Baptized. Immersed. Drenched. Inundated. Flooded with. Not many days from now.

You will be immersed in and drenched with the Spirit of the living God. Not many days you will be inundated and flooded with that which fills Me.

[5 : 26] Now, such a powerful promise would understandably cause powerful expectations. It would cause these apostles to begin to make certain kinds of deductions, which they did, but deductions which turned out to be wrong.

Lord, they say, Is it at this time that you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Israel. Israel. You can understand how they would begin to think in those terms, given the fact that one of the great promises of the prophets was the outpouring of the Spirit upon Israel at the restoration of Israel.

You can understand with the promise of the coming of the Spirit that they would make the deduction then that something great was going to happen for Israel. But they made the wrong deduction. They were still thinking politically. They were still thinking nationalistically. They were still thinking in ethnic exclusive terms.

Is it at this time that you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Jesus responds, It is not for you to know the times or epics which the Father has fixed in His own authority.

[6 : 46] That, I think, is a polite way of Jesus saying, That's none of your business. The times and epics are none of your business. Because between that 40-day period after His resurrection and His coming again, Jesus had something much more important for them to do than speculate about the times and epics.

So Jesus takes them back to the great promise He just spoke of. And He says, But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and even to the ends of the earth.

Jesus is telling the apostles that His agenda between that 40-day period after His resurrection and His coming again is not just for Israel. His agenda is for the whole world.

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, Persia, India, China. You shall be My witnesses to the ends of the earth.

The major thrust of Acts 1, 1-11 then, is this great worldwide promise. And the rest of the book of Acts shows how Jesus began to fulfill that promise.

[8 : 11] Ten days later, ten days after He disappeared from them into the cloud, on the day of Pentecost, while Jews from all over the world and other visitors had swarmed into the city of Jerusalem, Jesus now ascended to the throne, baptized the apostles and many others with His Spirit.

He poured out His Spirit upon them. And within a few hours, 3,000 people came to confess Jesus as Lord. And within a few days, 5,000 more came to make that confession.

Within a few short years, witness to Jesus as the living Lord of life was born way beyond Jewish soil, all the way up to Antioch of Syria and Iconium of Galatia and Colossae and Ephesus of Asia Minor and Athens and Corinth of Greece and to the capital city of Rome itself.

The Spirit came in power and raised up witnesses, witnesses to the suffering, the resurrection, and the aliveness of Jesus Christ all over the Roman Empire.

And what I want to emphasize today on this Worldwide Communion Sunday is that being a disciple of Jesus Christ at this particular moment of history on this part of the globe is a sign of Jesus fulfilling His promise.

[9 : 42] The fact that I, the product of a Swedish father and a Finnish mother, born in northern Minnesota on the North American continent, thousands of miles from Jerusalem, the fact that I should believe in and love Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, is not an accident of history.

It is the fulfillment of promise. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I am the fulfillment of promise.

And so are you. Fulfillment in two senses. First, the fact that I, born and raised in a cultural context so different from the one where the Spirit first came, have heard of Jesus and come to believe in Him, is a testimony of Jesus and His Spirit.

The Spirit has empowered witnesses who have come to me and I have believed the witness and I now know Jesus Christ. I am the fulfillment of promise.

And I am the fulfillment of promise in a second way. I now, too, am a witness. The Spirit comes upon me to make me a witness through whom other people can also then become a fulfillment of promise.

[11:07] promise. What especially moves me today is the fact that we have in this room believers from all over the world. And we are here together.

And the fact that we are here together is a sign of the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. promise. And it's a sign of hope that one day the promise will be completely fulfilled, that one day witness will be born in every people group all over the globe, and that one day people from every tribe and every tongue and every language will gather at table with Jesus.

The first outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost signaled what every subsequent outpouring of the Spirit would accomplish. Luke says in Acts 2, 5 that on Pentecost there were in Jerusalem, quote, people from every nation under heaven.

Close quote. People from every nation under heaven in Jerusalem at that time. And then he goes on to list some of them in Acts 2, verses 9 to 11.

Parthenians and Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, both Jews and proselytes, he says, and Cretans and Arabs.

[12:32] Jews and Arabs. Jews and Arabs. And Greeks and Romans. And what was the chief phenomena that happened the day that the Holy Spirit came upon all those nations?

What was the chief phenomena of Pentecost? Remember what it was? I wished I could have been there. It was that everyone was hearing the gospel in his own language.

Remember that? Peter and the others were Jewish apostles, and they were empowered by the Spirit to give witness to Jesus Christ.

And they gave this witness in their own language. church. But the miracle that took place that day was that people from every nation under heaven heard that message in their own language.

You see what was happening when Jesus first poured the Spirit on upon the church? What was happening is the reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel.

[13:38] Remember the story of Tower of Babel in Genesis 11? Remember the story of the Tower of Babel? The text says the whole earth used the same language and the same tongue.

And the text says that at one point all of these nations who were using the same language and the same tongue decided that they would build a city. And in the city they would build a tower quote whose top would reach into heaven.

That's a way of saying that at that one point all the nations of the world speaking the same language decided that they would build a city in which they would be their own gods.

Let us make a name for ourselves they say. That's a way of saying let us now build human society with us at the center. Let us build human society with man as the measure of all things.

We will build our own kingdom we will build the new world. But it never works. It never works because we were created for a human society with the living God at the center.

[14:52] Where God is the measure of all things. human societies without the living God at the center are built on a lie. And societies built upon a lie do not last.

So God in His mercy the Tower of Babel is all about mercy. God in His mercy acts to prevent humanity from building on a lie.

the Genesis text says that God came down and confused all the languages so that they might not understand one another's language so that they cannot build this city and its tower.

Babel means confusion. The text says and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. Then came the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost and the nations were gathered there and the nations heard together still in their own different languages but they heard and understood in the same place.

Why now? Why does God allow the nations of the world to hear that day in Jerusalem? Jerusalem. Why can they now understand one another?

[16:13] Because now there is a new center. Now the center is no longer man. The center is the God-man Jesus Christ in whom humanity finds its unity and its destiny.

Communication can now happen because in the new center we are not building upon a lie. In the new center who is Christ we are now building upon the truth.

Upon him who is the truth and who is the life the one in whom all things hold together. When the Spirit comes upon the disciples of Jesus there is the possibility of cross-cultural communication in him.

Thus within a few years the gospel spills over Jewish walls and it wins Samaritans who were half-Jews and it wins Gentiles who were non-Jews first in Antioch then Solomus then in Pisidian Antioch then in Rome and then in Spain and, and, and, and, and.

Tradition tells us that Peter took the gospel to Asia Minor to the Jews who were there from the diaspora under the Babylonian captivity. Andrew took the gospel to the barbarian people of southern Europe.

[17 : 32] Thomas planted a church among the Parthenians and finally ended up planting a church in South India. Matthew bore his witness among the cannibals in a place called Anthropophagia which means people who eat flesh.

He bore the witness among the cannibals and Matthew was executed there. An act which so troubled the tribal king that as Matthew was dying the king was converted and he became the instrument for the evangelization of that tribe.

Philip bore witness to a eunuch from Ethiopia and that man took the gospel to Ethiopia. Philip also helped found a church in Athens and Heropolis where he was executed.

Simon the Zealot and Judas formed a team and they brought the gospel to Persia to what is now Iraq. James the brother of John took the good news to Spain and Bartholomew took a copy of Matthew's gospel to India and he was the one who had ended up in Armenia.

And what I want to stress about this is that none of those names that I named were ordained. None of them were ordained. None was called reverend.

[18 : 41] None had gone to seminary. Now, being reverend and going to seminary is nothing wrong with it. I did it. But it wasn't because they were ordained.

It wasn't because they had gone to seminary that the witness went through the world. It happened because of the coming of the Holy Spirit. It happened because of the power of the Holy Spirit. It happened because Jesus kept His promise. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in the world. All along the way in church history, someone or some team of someones was led by the Spirit to cross over cultural, racial, economic barriers. The Spirit led the first witnesses out of the comfortable confines of Jerusalem, out of the comfortable confines of Judea, into the uncomfortable confines of Samaria, and into the greater uncomfortable confines of the Gentiles.

That's because the Spirit's passion is not just for Israel, but for all the peoples of the world. And the history of Jesus fulfilling His promise is the history of risk-taking.

[20 : 04] Disciples of Jesus overcoming racial prejudice and racial fear. And in those acts of risk-taking, they witnessed the emerging of a new human race, multi-language, multinational, multi-tongued, centered in the new God-man, Jesus Christ.

Why all the people groups coming to America in the last decades? Why all the people groups coming into our part of America? Why all the people are coming to Southern California?

Part of the reason, of course, is that America draws. Right? Having lived in the Philippines those four years, I saw how America draws.

America is a powerful magnet and is perceived as the land of freedom and opportunity for all peoples. But is that the only reason why the peoples of the world are coming to Southern California?

I think not. Scripture is clear that the movements of people groups is under the sovereignty of God. Movements of individuals are too, but the movements of people groups is under the sovereignty of God.

[21 : 22] Consider, for instance, Amos 9-7. I've never seen this passage before until this last couple months. Amos 9-7. In Amos 9-7, God is speaking to Israel whose movements were clearly in the hands of God.

Right? When we read Scripture, clearly Israel's movements are in the hands of God. Listen to Amos 9-7. God says, Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to me, O sons of Israel, says the Lord?

Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt and the Philistines from Kaffir and the Arameans from Kerr? Did you hear that?

God brought Israel out of Egypt, but God brought the Philistines out of Kaffir and God brought the Arameans out of Kerr. Why then all the people groups here in the Los Angeles area where some of the biggest and finest churches in the world are?

Why here? Because God moved them here. On the one hand, some have come from places where there is no substantial witness to Jesus, and so God has brought that people group here to receive the witness.

[22 : 41] On the other hand, some groups have come from places where there is very substantial witness to Jesus, and God has brought them here to give the witness. I believe that part of God's plan to evangelize secular America is to bring peoples into America to reach native-born Americans which the native-born Americans can no longer reach.

How's that for a spin on Southern California? Do you know the name Dr. Ralph Winter, who is the director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship?

He recently published a chart that shows how this witness is spreading throughout the world, and I have it for you in the insert. And Dr. Winter has demonstrated that the spreading of the witness in the world now is going faster than the population growth.

He has on this chart the number of Bible-believing Christians compared with the total number of people in the world. And look at A.D. 1430. In A.D. 1430, there was one Christian for every 99 people in the world.

In A.D. 1790, there was one Christian for every 49. In 1940, there was one for every 32 and on. Go down to 1986, there was one to every 11. 1989, one to every 10.

[24 : 09] 1993, one to every 9. 1995, one to every 8. Isn't that incredible? Jesus promised it would be that when He pours His Spirit upon the world, upon His disciples, the whole world is going to hear.

What especially moves me is what is happening in Korea. And it moves me because it was Presbyterians, American Presbyterians, and white American Presbyterians at that, who first brought the witness to Jesus onto Korean soil.

And what a witness it was. This is one time, or we've done it other times, but this is clearly the one time that the American missionary enterprise did it right. We did it right in Korea.

And now, the Korean church is growing incredibly fast and incredibly deep. And now, the Holy Spirit is moving the disciples of Jesus in Korea to send missionaries throughout the world.

Right now, there are 4,000 Korean missionaries on the field. 4,000. 90% of them are in non-Korean context.

[25 : 28] 400 of them are in the former USSR. And many of them are in Islamic countries where white, Anglo folks like me can't even get in. Is it at this time that you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

It's not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed in His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Israel and in Jordan and in Turkey and in Tanzania and in Sri Lanka and in Japan and New Zealand and in Brazil and in Mexico and to the ends of the earth.

So what can we do on this worldwide communion Sunday to make sure that we do not miss out on the moving of the Spirit in our time? Can I suggest briefly six things you can do and may I ask you to write them down?

You won't remember what I'm going to say unless you make a note of it anyway. Six things that I think we can do to make sure that we're going to be part of this dramatic moving of the Spirit around the world.

The first is that we can give thanks for that known or unknown person or group who reached out to our ethnic group with the gospel.

[26 : 53] Give thanks for the persons who reached out to our ethnic groups. I first encountered Jesus on the lap of my Swedish grandmother in northern Minnesota. who first encountered Jesus as a little girl as a Swede in Finland.

Someone risked ridicule. Someone risked rejection and even death to witness to Jesus among the Swedes and Finns. The Swedes and Finns at that time were a warring, wild, barbarian bunch along with the Norwegians.

I thank God for that person who came and witnessed to my ancestors.

We can also take time to give thanks for the individuals along the way who bore witness to us so that we could get to the place of faith. I give thanks for my grandmother and for my mom and dad and for Art Jensen, the barber who used to witness to me every time I had a haircut.

I didn't like it, but he won. And for Hollis Allen, the pastor who took me under his wings. Secondly, we can ask God to put on our hearts one of the unreached people groups of the world.

[28 : 10] Take out an atlas tonight or take out your globe and just pray over that and allow God to tie your heart to one part of the world, to an unreached people group. Now, unreached peoples mean those who have not yet had any significant witness to Jesus.

And I'm told from the missiologists that there are 2,500 unreached people groups yet to reach. Rob, I'm wondering if I can ask you and the Mission and Outreach Commission to get that data for us in the next weeks and we'll have it available and people can have more intelligence as they pray over the globe.

Can you do that? Try to learn as much as you can about that unreached people group. Learn about its history, its myths, and its needs and then pray for them. Third, and now we're getting closer to home, we can ask God to give us His love for one of the ethnic groups in the greater Los Angeles area.

And I'm going to suggest that the group we pick is the group for whom we presently feel the greatest anger or resentment or disgust.

pray for that group. Ask God to help us see that group through His eyes and ask God for grace to overcome the anger or the disgust or the resentment.

[29 : 28] Ask God to help us get to know someone in that group so that we can discover that group's history and myths and needs. Fourth, a little closer to home again, we can write down the names of the people who live around us, either in our apartment complex or in our neighborhood.

Write down their names and pray for them. Asking the Holy Spirit to raise up a witness for that person and be willing to be that witness. Ask the Holy Spirit to create an opportunity where we can invite that person to an event where the name of Jesus is lifted high.

It really dawned on me the other day, if I don't pray for the neighbors right around me, who will?

Now, fifth, we can write out our own personal witness, our own little creed.

If you were to be asked this afternoon, why did you decide to follow Jesus Christ, what would you say? If you were given three minutes on the Ofer Renfrey show this week and she was giving you three minutes to say, what does Jesus Christ mean to you today, what would you say?

I'm encouraging you to write it out. So that you can have it there very clearly. Here's an example of a witness that I really like. This man named Kenneth Chafin was asked by a very secularized woman, so, what does Jesus do for you today?

[30 : 56] And here's his response. There are several things that Jesus does for me right now. First, he helps me accept the fact that I'm not perfect. I make mistakes and he forgives me day by day.

Second, he helps me to accept the gifts I have and use them in a way that gives me a sense of fulfillment. Third, he helps me to love people that I would not have loved before. Fourth, he gives me good friends in the church who love me and care for me in all circumstances of life.

Fifth, he gives me meaning in life beyond myself. And finally, he helps me to accept the fact that I'm mortal. In some way, day will die. He gives me hope that there's resurrection after I do die. I like that.

He helps me accept the fact I'm not perfect and he helps me deal with the fact that I'm mortal. But what would you say to Ophir Winfrey? Work on our verbal witness, recognizing, of course, that there's that whole nonverbal witness that goes behind it.

Then sixth, we can open up more fully to the Holy Spirit and to open up more intentionally. You see, the exhortation of Acts 1, 1 to 11 is not get out there.

[32 : 07] When you read this passage and it tells you get out there, you read it wrong. The exhortation is not get out there because the fact of the matter is we're already out there.

We are already at Glendale High and Burbank High and Occidental College and Disney and Bank of America and Children's Hospital. We're in construction sites. We're in boardrooms. We are out there.

Right? The exhortation of Acts 1, 1 to 11 is open up out there. Open up to the Holy Spirit who is out there.

Open up to the Spirit whose passion it is to make Jesus the issue on every inch of real estate on this globe. Which means then this morning I'm not calling us to any new activity. you're all too busy. I'm too busy to have another activity. I'm not calling us to another activity. All I'm calling us to do is open up to the Spirit in the midst of all those activities to the Spirit who empowers and to the Spirit who will orchestrate the witness He wants folks out there to receive.

[33 : 25] You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses.

It's a promise. A promise He has fulfilled a million times over. A promise He is fulfilling millions times over. A promise He will fulfill.

I am a disciple not as faithful a one as I want to be by any stretch of the imagination but I am a disciple of Jesus Christ which means I am the fulfillment of promise.

Witnesses have come to me and as a result of their witness I have come to believe in the Jewish Messiah and the Holy Spirit has come upon me and is empowering me to be a witness so that others can be a fulfillment of promise.

Come now and join me at the table with believers all over the world. Come and receive from Him what only He can give.

[34 : 44] Come and receive Him so that we may be freshly empowered to be what He made us to be. What He made us to be.