

PM Acts 1:1-14 The Work is the Lord's

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[0 : 00] 9.5. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

10.5. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, You heard from me, for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

[1 : 29] 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. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying. Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the zealot and Judas the son of James.

[2 : 55] All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the woman and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers.

Amen. Amen. And we pray God's... Amen. If you follow the McSheen daily reading calendar, you will have read already through the Acts of the Apostles this year.

And what a thrilling story the Acts of the Apostles present to us. From an upper room in Jerusalem to an open prison house in Rome, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ spread rapidly across the Mediterranean world and many thousands turned to the Lord in repentance and in faith.

The outline of the 28 chapters that make up the book is given in some of the words that we've read together in the first chapter, verse 8, where we read, The Lord saying, You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and to the end of the earth.

That's basically the sections of the book of Acts as it unfolds. It begins in Jerusalem, moves into Samaria, goes throughout all Judea, and then beyond Judea to the end of the earth, to the capital of the Roman Empire.

[4 : 52] It's a truly marvelous story. And as far as I'm concerned, it's one that never grows old. And it's just utterly amazing, isn't it?

Especially if we think about the men who were the Lord's witnesses. The apostles, the disciples, who during the days of the Lord's ministry in Galilee and Judea, showed little sign of the kind of men they would eventually turn out to be.

That's particularly true of Peter. Peter, the disciple, who you remember, boasted of his loyalty and allegiance to Jesus, and who said confidently, Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

And yet, within a few short hours of saying those words, he was denying his Lord and Master for a third time.

Luke tells us that when the rooster crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter, across the courtyard of the high priest's house, we read, and Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.

[6 : 24] And he went out and wept bitterly. How was it possible that such a man, such a failure as a witness, could be transformed into a courageous and able preacher of the gospel, able to take his stand in front of vast multitudes of people and proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, the answer to that question is found in this passage that we read this evening. Peter and his fellow disciples were to receive power when the Holy Spirit was to come upon them.

And then, and only then, could they be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, in old Judea, in Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

But we need to take a little step further back and notice some other words that Luke includes at the beginning of this book, which is really the second volume of a larger book.

The first volume is the book that he describes to Theophilus as containing all that Jesus began to do and teach.

[7 : 58] Acts 1, verse 1. And Luke is referring, of course, to his gospel, the gospel of Luke in our New Testament scriptures. And the gospel of Luke is the book that contains all that Jesus, and notice this word, began to do and to teach.

those words carry an implication. And that shouldn't be lost on us. If the gospel of Luke contains all that Jesus began to do and teach, then the Acts of the Apostles contains all that Jesus continued to do and teach.

Now that is such an important point to grasp and to understand. Though this book of the Acts of the Apostles is referred to as the Acts of the Apostles, it's perhaps more accurate to refer to it as the Acts of the Ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

Because it's a book that tells us what this Lord Jesus continued to do and to teach. It was the Ascended Lord who, with the Father, sent the Holy Spirit on the church on the day of Pentecost. You remember how it was foretold in the gospel that the one John would baptize would himself in turn baptize with or in the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 47] It was Jesus, the Ascended glorified Lord Jesus who was going to baptize them with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Chapter 1 verse 5 of Acts. It was Jesus who would send the Spirit that would come upon the disciples with power so that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth. As I say, this is such an important point to grasp and one that is as much importance to us today whether we're living as believers here in Dumfries or in Livingston or wherever the Lord has placed us to bear witness to his gospel.

This truth is as important today as it was in the first century AD to know and to grasp that the work that the Lord has called us to do is first and foremost the Lord's work and to know and to grasp that we are merely instruments in his hands.

That is absolutely vital to grasp and to understand. In and of ourselves and surely we know this only too well we are weak and we are powerless.

[11 : 39] We can't save our own souls let alone save somebody else's soul. As Jonah discovered in the belly of the great fish that swallowed him up salvation belongs to the Lord.

And as the psalmist declared in Psalm 127 verse 1 unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labour in vain.

And as Paul asked the Corinthians who were putting far too much importance on men what then is Apollos? What is Paul?

servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each. I planted Apollos watered but God gave the growth.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3, 5 to 7 Do we really grasp that truth?

[12 : 57] We are nothing only God who gives the growth. The Psalmist in Psalm 115 verse 1 says Not to us O Lord not to us but to your name give glory.

And so when we take these things on board we are humbled to the dust. But my friends on the ground on our faces in the dust before the Lord is a good place to be.

Knowing and feeling our own weakness yes ought to humble us but it shouldn't discourage us instead humbled yes it should also encourage us to look up to the ascended Lord Jesus Christ and to take his words on board that we heard this morning to pray without ceasing and not to give up. it was our Lord who recorded these words sorry it was Luke who recorded these words of our Lord in his gospel in the first volume of his two volume work what father among you if his son asks for a fish will instead of a fish give him a serpent or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion if you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will the heavenly father give now what does Luke say next he says something different from Matthew and Mark it's not good gifts that's what we read in the other gospels but in Luke how much more will the heavenly father give the holy spirit that's what Luke says to those who ask him Luke chapter 11 verses 11 to 13 now isn't it significant that the passage we read together ends with a prayer meeting in an upper room here were present the eleven disciples the woman who accompanied Jesus and supported his ministry out of their own means Mary his mother and his brothers as well and we are told in verse 14 of Acts chapter 1 all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer they had received the promise the promise of the father promise the outpouring of the [16:19] Holy Spirit through whom you will receive power to fulfill the commission that the risen Lord had given them yes they had received the promise promise but now they were praying for the promises fulfillment and that's always the pattern in scripture the promise leads to prayer for the promises fulfillment Thomas Watson the favorite Puritan author of many said these lovely words the tree of promise only drops its fruit when shaken by the hand of prayer that's a that's a great picture to keep in your mind the tree of promise only drops its fruit when shaken by the hand of prayer and as I say we see that so often in the pages of scripture and here in Acts chapter 1 it's no exception the promise of the spirit and power came to the disciples in answer to their devoted praying so what encouragement we have here to pray likewise the example of the disciples in these days prior to the day of Pentecost but also in these words of our Lord

Jesus Christ how much more will the heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him now I'm not concerned at this particular point in drawing out the distinctions between the epoch making coming of the Holy Spirit on this particular day and praying for the Holy Spirit's ministry and fullness and power and enabling we can deal with that on another occasion but we need the Spirit's presence in greater measure we need his fullness we need his power we need his enabling and I think we only know that too well at a personal level and also as we survey the church scene across our country but

I want to draw your attention to three very simple lessons that we can learn and take away from this passage this evening and the first lesson is this the church and its mission in this world is predicated on the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ Christianity first and foremost is not a teaching it's not a set of values it's not a philosophy it's not a manner of life it is a person it is a person without him there is no Christianity in past generations there were people who were quite prepared to give up the idea that a person called Jesus of Nazareth ever actually lived to them it was immaterial what is important is the teaching the ethics the morality

Christianity but it does matter that Jesus was a real living once dead now resurrected and ascended glorified person without him there is no such thing as Christianity he is a person who is alive he died and was raised from the dead he ascended into heaven he is enthroned at God's right hand he is the heir of all the promises made to David when he died on the cross a sign was put above his head this is the king of the

Jews and that message speaks greater things than Pilate ever imagined Jesus Christ is the Jewish king foretold through the prophecies of the Old Testament scriptures and his kingdom will stretch from shore to shore till moon shall wax and wane no more and the nations shall worship him there can therefore be no question or doubt in our minds about the outcome of the mission that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to his first disciples and through them to us we can have no doubt considering who it is who gave the commission the ascended crowned enthroned lord of the universe and so we ask the question can God fail can his purposes come to nothing can man thwart

[22:52] God's plans and the answer is no of course not well what about this will God renege on the promises that he has made will the father refuse to give the son his own request and the answer again is no listen to these words spoken by God sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool Psalm 110 verse 1 the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies

your footstool God the father said that to Jesus Christ when he was enthroned at his ascension all of

Christ's enemies are going to be made a footstool for his feet do you have any doubt that that will take place listen to these words spoken of this king of the Jews in Psalm 72 18 and 19 this is the word of God may his name endure forever his fame continue as long as the sun may people be blessed in him may all nations call him blessed do you have any doubt in your mind that this promise slash prophecy will be unfulfilled God has spoken and then in Psalm 2 we are given the opportunity to listen to something which the father says to the son ask of me says the father to his son and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession the father says to the son here's something I want you to ask of me and the son as the incarnate lord as the mediator as the prophet priest and king of God's people comes to his father and in obedience to his father's command he asks he puts to the father this request that the father has asked him to make of the father father will you make the nations my heritage will you give me the ends of the earth as my possession and do you think the father's going to turn around to his son and say get out of here you ask too much you don't deserve that absolutely no way it's unthinkable and that's why we read in the acts of the apostles of the amazing spread of the gospel across the Mediterranean world in the first century in the lifetime of the apostles apostles this is the explanation behind the many conversions that took place in the acts and the spread of the gospel it all has to do with Jesus Jesus Christ Jesus Christ the Lord enthroned at God's right hand and now receiving the nations as his inheritance in Acts 2 23 and it's amazing if you start to read through the acts of the apostles and you begin to take note of the actions that work attributed to the Lord Jesus Christ even though he's now in heaven he's still intimately involved and from time to time you you can discover what is happening what he is doing in Acts 2 33 he is the one who pours out his Holy Spirit he's actively involved in this great work of pouring out his spirit on the day of Pentecost verse 39 of chapter 2 he's actively calling men and women through the gospel to faith in himself chapter 2 verse 46 7 we read that the Lord and that's referring to Jesus added to their number day by day those who were being saved it's Jesus who's adding to the number of the disciples it's Jesus who is growing his church if you skip through to chapter 11 verse 21 we read and the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned to the Lord speaking about the outreach and witness of the Christians in Antioch the hand of the Lord was with them and you get this repeated through the narrative of the history of the Acts of the Apostles this is the explanation the heavenly exalted

Lord Jesus is actively at work the hand of the Lord was with them was upon them yes it would be a fascinating study to read through this book and pick out such references to the activity of this exalted person he's not dead he's not gone on a far away journey he's on the heavenly throne he rules the world he's actively involved in building his church and then the second lesson we can draw from this passage and these truths is that the Lord chooses to use his disciples as his instruments in this great work and we should know that because at the very beginning when he calls his first disciples he says to them follow me and I will make you fishers of men and here he says to them before he ascends into heaven you yes you

[30 : 35] I've chosen you to be my witnesses in Matthew's account all authority in heaven and earth has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ and he says to his disciples go therefore and make disciples of all nations you're going to be my instruments you're going to be my servants I'm responsible for the work but I'm bringing you into the work and putting this honour upon you look again at 1 Corinthians 3 5 to 9 that we read a few moments ago where the apostle Paul is reasoning with the Corinthians who were putting far too much emphasis upon their favourite preachers Peter and Paul and

Apollos and in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 5 he asks what then is Apollos what is Paul servants servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each I planted Apollos watered but God gave the growth so neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who gives the growth he who plants and he who waters are one and each will receive his wages according to his labour for we are God's fellow workers we are God's fellow workers now the Lord could have saved all his children in the same way as he brought Saul of Tarsus into the kingdom of God you know the light that shone upon him on the road to Damascus a direct illumination that temporarily blinded but then changed the heart of Saul of Tarsus and turned him from being a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insolent man into a saved sinner and preacher of the gospel

he once tried to destroy but the Lord chooses not to act in that way normally the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch is so different from the conversion of Saul you read the story in Acts chapter 8 and you see how this man coming back from Jerusalem heading towards his home country was reading the scroll of Isaiah the prophet and his chariot and as he's reading

Philip draws alongside and he hears what he's reading and he says do you understand what you're reading and the man says how can I understand unless someone explains it to me and Philip Philip is on the prophet and he is on the scripture and to explain and expound the scripture and to show the Ethiopian that this portion of Isaiah's prophecy relates to one Jesus of Nazareth death that's how the Lord usually works through an instrument a servant whom he has assigned a task he brings us into the privileged position of being an instrument in his hand of bringing salvation to our fellow men and women and the third point that we can learn from this passage and this is the final point

I finish with this is that the work of the spirit is absolutely vital for the success of the church's mission the apostles must wait for the power to come from on high I remember reading of C.H. [35:16] Spurgeon that remarkable 19th century preacher of London preached for some 25-30 years to 6,000 people morning and evening in the metropolitan tabernacle and it wasn't just to the same people for many of these people were converted and they went out and planted other churches around London so that one church planted and spawned many other satellite churches in London but what a remarkable man sometimes referred to as the prince of preachers and yet he said that every time he walked up the steps of that great platform pulpit in the metropolitan tabernacle he said to himself I believe in the Holy Spirit I believe in the Holy Ghost I believe in the Holy Ghost he knew the success of his ministry he was preaching God's word in the power of God's spirit spirit I was shocked and stunned when one of my colleagues in the banner of truth one of the trustees said do you know that John Owen once wrote without the Holy Spirit we might as well burn our Bibles I thought no way the great Puritan theologian John Owen he'd never have said that would he I looked it up and he did say words to that effect the word without the spirit will do us no good we need the spirit to open our eyes do you remember how the Lord Jesus came to the disciples and he opened the scriptures to them but then there was a second opening he opened their eyes their hearts so that they could understand the scriptures we need the ministry of the spirit the spirit who caused these scriptures to be written to be given we need him to give us the life that the scriptures speak of John Knox attributed the success of the Scottish Reformation to God giving his Holy Spirit to simple men who preached the gospel it's like what the Lord says without me you can do nothing only God gives the growth and that if this last point can have a little sub point it is going back to

Acts chapter 1 how does it the passage that we read end in verse what 14 all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer with one accord all of them devoting themselves to prayer because prayer is the means by which God gives us the power the spirit supplies if we've really understood these points and principles out of this chapter then Wednesday night will be a red letter day in our weekly calendar because that's the prayer meeting and this church or any church for that matter will not grow without the sweet life-giving influences of the

Holy Spirit sent by Jesus and we know from what we've seen that we are to pray for that to happen how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him don't leave Jerusalem wait for the promise of the Father 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 ends of the earth all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer the apostle Paul had a marvelous marvelous ministry one of the high notes of that ministry was his visit to

[41:04] Thessalonica and we've been studying that first letter for some time but he writes a second letter to that church and at the end of the letter he says finally brothers pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread ahead speed ahead and be honored as happened among you and if we turn to first Thessalonians we see what exactly he meant as happened among you I want what happened among you to happen where I'm preaching the gospel today so I want what happened five six seven years ago I want it to happen today and tomorrow and the next day wherever whenever I preach the gospel and what happened in Thessalonica our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the

Holy Spirit and with full conviction and the upshot you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his

son from heaven whom he raised from the dead Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come
brothers pray that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored by being received in this
manner may God bless his word to us for our encouragement and perseverance in the work that
belongs and is of the
Lord let us pray another day to pray sir and are household by