

Text: Acts 1:1-5

Title: “Our Unstoppable God”

Open your Bibles to Acts 1. Before I begin I want to remind you that next Sunday is our One Day. Because our Sunday schedule has us worshipping in different venues, we need to all come together at times. Next Sunday we'll share together in the Lord's Supper and baptisms, and I will have a very important challenge to our church about our future. Read text. Pray.

I'm starting a new series from the book of Acts entitled, “Unstoppable ... Living in the Irrepressible Power of God's Spirit.” I don't know about you but I am faced with circumstances every day that remind me how weak I am and how much I need God's power in my life. Whether it's living a life that glorifies God, or being a man of holiness, or being a godly husband, or being an effective witness, or wisely leading our church, without the power of God's Spirit on my life, I fail miserably. On the other hand, the more I know of God, the more I see what an awesomely powerful God He is. He's so powerful that He never fails to accomplish what He intends to do. So the secret is to somehow get my weak life plugged into Him.

You see, God is on an unstoppable quest. Jesus said that the Gospel of the Kingdom *will* be proclaimed to the nations. And at the end of the Bible we are given a glimpse of heaven that *will* be populated with people from every nation and people group. God is on an unstoppable quest. And the mystery of His grace is that He plans to include us in this unstoppable quest. This message and the life-changing power that goes with it is to be carried from one person to another person ... from one nation to another nation until the day Christ returns to establish His eternal kingdom. The Book of Acts shows us that this quest is unstoppable because God is unstoppable.

Now let's look at the text again.

Acts 1:1-2 - In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

So from these verses we learn that Acts is actually a sequel.

ILLUSTRATION – Nan and I went to a movie a couple of weeks ago. The plot to the movie was very complicated and involved. I was looking at my watch after about an hour and forty-five minutes thinking that this problem can't be solved in one movie. I began to suspect that there was a sequel coming that would be necessary for the whole story to play out. And sure enough, the end of the movie left us hanging and expecting the sequel.

So what happens in Acts is a sequel to the Gospels. To get the whole story we must connect the two. We learn later in the book that the author is Luke, who also wrote the Gospel of Luke. In his Gospel, like the other Gospel writers, Luke told about the life and ministry of Jesus climaxing with His dying on the Cross for our sins, His resurrection with power over sin and death and His ascension to the right hand of the Father. And these facts make up the Gospel which people are to hear and believe in order to be saved.

Now there was the very real possibility, humanly speaking, that after Jesus died, rose again and went back to heaven, and after those first eye-witnesses died, the life-changing message of the Gospel could have also died.

ILLUSTRATION – Did you hear the story last week about the guy who pulled up in a pick-up truck to the drive-thru window at a Chick-fil-a out in Abilene? He told the person at the window that his name was John and that he wanted to pay for the meals of people coming along behind him in the drive-thru. Then he handed the window attendant ten \$100 bills ... \$1000! The report went on to say that the next 88 cars in the drive-thru line got their meals free. Now I was thinking what it would be like for #89 in line. Maybe I heard on the radio or on Facebook what was happening and I hurried to get in line at a Chick-fil-a. When I get to the window the attendant says, “Sorry, the gift has run out. The last car used up the last dollars.”

You see, as generous as that gift was, it had a limit. But the power of the gospel is unlimited and unstoppable. There will never be a time when it runs out. The Book of Acts shows that the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the message of the Gospel, changed the world as the Holy Spirit empowered the church to take the life-changing message to the world. And it will not stop until God closes the curtain on history.

There are two very compelling realities that fueled the life and the mission of those early believers. They’re the same compelling realities that must fuel our lives and our church.

1. THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

Acts 1:3 - After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

So Jesus gave them “convincing proofs that he was alive.” That’s the reality imbedded in the hearts of those early believers ... Jesus is alive. It’s that reality that transformed a cowardly band of followers of Jesus into a force that would grip the world of that day ... and continues to do so through us in our day.

In spite of the attacks of skeptics through the ages, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ remains one of the most verifiable facts of history. There many, many convincing proofs. It says that Jesus appeared to them *repeatedly* over a period of forty days. If this had been just a one-time sighting then someone could argue that they just saw someone who looked like Jesus, or that they were hallucinating.

By the way, we’re told elsewhere in the NT that the author Luke was a physician. And we get a hint of that here when he uses the word “appeared.” In the original language it’s the word from which we get our word “ophthalmology,” having to do with the eyeball. A physician looks for facts. What more convincing proof that to have Jesus literally become visible to them time after time. And He spoke to them. He taught them about the Kingdom of God. There was content to His speech. And Jesus ate with them; they saw Jesus actually putting food in His mouth. There were many convincing proofs.

So it was the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that transformed a cowardly band of followers of Jesus into a force that would grip the world of that day. It was the reality that Jesus was alive that inspired many of the first Christians to die rather than deny that Jesus is Lord. You don't do that for a dead leader; you do that for a living Lord. Maybe that's missing in our lives today ... maybe the reason that we live such anemic spiritual lives and we're so weak in our witness is that we're not really convinced that Jesus is alive ... that we're not living in daily fellowship with a living Lord. The living Lord Jesus must be a compelling reality in our lives.

The second compelling reality that fueled our spiritual ancestors, and that continues to fuel us today is...

2. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

The way that the first reality, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, becomes effective in our lives is by the second reality, the power of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives makes the presence of the living Lord Jesus real in us.

Now Jesus did not intend for this unstoppable quest to be accomplished by human ingenuity or human energy or human grit. Sometimes we have that and sometimes we don't. God's unstoppable quest will have to be dependent on a power that is as unlimited and unstoppable as God Himself. That's why it says...

Acts 1:4 - On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

The mission Jesus gave His followers was a spiritual mission that required spiritual power which would come from the Holy Spirit. So Jesus said, "Don't you dare charge out on this mission without first receiving the power I have for you to accomplish the mission. Only then will you be unstoppable." We cannot be effective as followers of Jesus without the filling of the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the gift God promised them.

Notice the way that Jesus describes the work that the Holy Spirit would do in their lives. We experience the Holy Spirit as...

A GIFT - Acts 1:4b - Wait for the gift my Father promised...

The coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives is part of the gift of eternal life given to us when we receive Christ by faith. We can't earn this gift. We don't deserve this gift.

We also experience the Holy Spirit as...

A PROMISE - Acts 1:4b - Wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

Now when did the Father promise this gift of the Spirit? We see it in numerous places in the OT, but one is found in...

Isaiah 44:3 - I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

Through Isaiah the Lord promised that salvation through Jesus Christ would come to the nation of Israel, and then to the Gentiles. And God spoke about it as a day when He would pour out His Spirit. So you see here that the gift and the promise of the Holy Spirit are connected to our redemption and our salvation. Receiving Christ by faith is the same as receiving the Holy Spirit by faith. It happens when we are saved.

So the Father promised it and Jesus spoke about it in...

John 14:16 - And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—

John 14:17 - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

In Old Testament times the people of God were helped and empowered by the Holy Spirit, but it wasn't until the death, resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit that believers would be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

So we experience the Holy Spirit as a gift, a promise and as...

A BAPTISM – Acts 1:5 - For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Now we are familiar with water baptism or physical baptism. Jesus here speaks of a spiritual baptism. In physical baptism a person is immersed in water to confess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. It signifies what happens in spiritual baptism. When the Holy Spirit comes to live in us we are immersed and united with the life of Christ. Again, the presence of the Holy Spirit makes the presence of the risen Christ real to us.

What did Jesus mean when He said in v.4 for them to “wait for the gift” of the Holy Spirit? Jesus said in...

Luke 24:49 - I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

We know how the disciples spent those days waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. They didn't sit around playing cards to kill the time. We read later in Acts 1 what they did. When they returned to Jerusalem they went to house and...

Acts 1:14a - They all joined together constantly in prayer,

So they prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit by fervently seeking God in prayer. The power of the Holy Spirit was to be appropriated and received by prayer and faith. This was true of the initial gift of the Holy Spirit and it is true of every subsequent filling of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that we receive the Holy Spirit when we receive Christ by faith. But having received Christ we are to regularly be refilled and refueled with the Spirit. That's what it says in...

Ephesians 5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Don't live your life under the influence of alcohol. Live your life under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Keep on being filled with the Spirit.

ILLUSTRATION – I still have an old iPhone 4, so I'm at least two generations behind in the technology. I am constantly frustrated at how quickly the power is drained away. It needs to be constantly recharged. When it comes to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, when you are saved you are given the Holy Spirit. But because we are weak, limited human beings the power of the Holy Spirit is drained by our life in this world ... sometimes by sin ... sometimes by service. So we need to be recharged. This is what the Bible calls being filled with the Spirit.

So Jesus said, "Go and wait until you are clothed with power from on high..." Here's what God intends. He intends to dress up His Son and His life-changing message in human beings and to aim us at the world with a mission. In Acts we're not reading about some heroes who did this long ago and then they died and now all we have is nostalgic story of the glory days. No, we have here the pattern for how God intends to fulfill His purposes in every generation until Jesus Christ comes again. He intends to do it through believers like us who are clothed with the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ who every day fulfills His mission through us.

So in this sense the Book of Acts is still being written. If Acts is Volume 1 (from the first century), we are volume 21 of the continued acts of Jesus Christ through men and women and young people who clothed with His power.