

Text: Acts 1:6-11

Title: “Our Unstoppable Mission”

VIDEO ILLUSTRATION – Last year for my birthday Nan gave me a gift that I finally got to enjoy a couple of weekends ago. I got to go out to Texas Motor Speedway and climb in a NASCAR race car with a 700hp engine under the hood and take that little car for a ride. Here’s a video of part of my ride. Now to be perfectly truthful, I wasn’t driving. A professional driver named Randy was actually at the wheel. I would have crashed in the first turn. No, I suited up, squeezed through the window on the passenger side, put on my helmet, buckled my safety harness and went on the ride of my life.

It must have felt that way for the first followers of Jesus. For three years they had been on the ride of their lives with Jesus, hearing Him teach, watching Him perform miracles, feeling His love. Then Jesus died and it appeared that the ride was over. But then Jesus surprised them on that first Easter morning when He rose again. And for forty days Jesus spent precious time with the disciples preparing them for a great assignment He had for them.

I’ve just begun a series taking us through the book of Acts, but this morning I want to begin, not in Acts, but in Luke. Open your Bibles to Luke 24. Luke wrote the book of Acts as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. Notice what Jesus said to His disciples shortly before He ascended to heaven. Read Luke 24:46-49.

So what we learn from these verses is that God was on an unstoppable quest when He sent His Son to come to this earth, to die for our sins and to be raised from the dead. He was redeeming lost humanity from the grip of sin and death. That message (the Gospel) would to be delivered to people of every nation and of every generation, starting in their day in Jerusalem. And Jesus would do that through His followers. So God’s unstoppable quest would become their unstoppable quest. But Jesus knew that they would not be unstoppable if they ran off trying to do this in their own strength. So He would do something amazing. He would send the Holy Spirit to take up residence in those first followers of Jesus so that they could be clothed with power to be such bold witnesses to the Gospel that others would believe and be saved and receive the Holy Spirit and be empowered to do it all over again ... to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth ... and on and on it would go.

So turn now to Acts 1 where we have Jesus suiting up His team for this unstoppable mission. This series from the book of Acts is entitled “Unstoppable: Living in the Irrepressible Power of the Holy Spirit.” Read Acts 4:4-8.

Acts tells us how for the next thirty years this unstoppable force captured life and after life in nation after nation. It changed the world! But what we read about on the pages of Acts is not just what God *used* to do. We are talking about something that God still *wants* to do, and He still *will* do. God’s unstoppable quest to get the Gospel to the nations must become our unstoppable mission as we join God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice two things Jesus said must happen for us to join God in His unstoppable mission. As individuals and as a church, we need to...

1. RECEIVE THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...

Now all of this is leading up to something that will happen in Acts 2, namely the coming of the Holy Spirit on the followers of Jesus, a group of about 120. We're told in Acts 1 that they obeyed Jesus and returned to Jerusalem to wait there for God to send the promise of the Holy Spirit. We're told that they prayed continuously and fervently. And ten days later on the Day of Pentecost it happened just as Jesus said it would. The Holy Spirit came upon them like a mighty rushing wind. You see, Jesus made a promise to send His Spirit in power, and promises are to be claimed in prayer. So write this in your notes:

OUTLINE - We receive the power of the Holy Spirit when by prayer we yield completely to God.

Now when the disciples heard Jesus talking about the pouring out of the Holy Spirit they immediately begin to think that it's time for the Messiah to bring in His earthly kingdom. They knew that the OT promised a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit would happen in the last days when God established His Kingdom on earth and restored His people Israel. That's why it says in ...

Acts 1:6 - So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Acts 1:7 - He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

So Jesus said to His followers, "That's not the program you need to worry about. The Father will take care of that in time. But until that time comes you are to be busy about something else."

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Power ... we're talking about something that changes things and makes things happen.

ILLUSTRATION – You've heard of the Nobel Prizes. There's a Nobel Prize for peace, literature, physics, economics and more. The Nobel Prize is named after a Swedish engineer and inventor named Alfred Nobel. He owned a bridge building company and he needed something to help them in excavating large chunks of rock. So he began to tinker with an explosive black powder and came up with a safe way to blow up stuff. So Alfred Nobel patented his new invention and originally named it Nobel's Blasting Powder. But he thought it needed a new name. The story is that Mr. Nobel called on a friend who was a Greek scholar and asked him what the Greek word was for "power." His friend told him the word was *dunamis* (doona-mees). From that was coined the new name for Nobel's Blasting Powder ... dynamite ... the word Jesus uses in...

Acts 1:8a - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...

Those first followers of Jesus received the Holy Spirit power at Pentecost, but since then it happens for people when they put their faith in Jesus and are saved. So if you are a believer, when you were

saved the Holy Spirit came to live in you. The Spirit comes with power to live for God's glory ... power to live a holy life ... power to love ... power to serve and really help other people ... and power to witness to Jesus Christ.

But as we read Acts we know that having received the first gift and filling of the Holy Spirit, there were times when they needed to be refilled and refueled for the mission. For instance, after the experience in Jerusalem at Pentecost, the apostles became so bold in their witness for Jesus that they were called before the Jewish leaders and instructed to stop speaking about Jesus. Well these guys couldn't do that. They had experienced something unstoppable. Having been threatened by the authorities the apostles went back to the other believers and told them what happened. A great prayer meeting broke out and as a result...

Acts 4:31 - After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

While the Holy Spirit never leaves us once we are saved, there are times when we need to be refueled and refilled with the Holy Spirit for the power we need to live the life of Jesus.

So the way you and I become part of God's unstoppable mission is to first receive the Holy Spirit's power. But this power is given for a very specific purpose. So we are to...

2. RELEASE THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

This power is not merely for our *enjoyment*; it is for our *employment* in the mission of Jesus.

Acts 1:8b - You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Think of all the things Jesus could have said would happen to us when we received the power of the Holy Spirit. He could have said, "You will be my theologians. You will be my social activists. You will be my Bible scholars." No! The gift of your salvation and the Holy Spirit coming to live within you is to enable and empower you to be a witness for Jesus. So what is *received* is to then be *released*. Write this in your notes.

OUTLINE - The power of the Holy Spirit is released through holy living and courageous witnessing.

Jesus said, "You will be *My* witnesses." Now what is a witness? A witness is someone who just tells what they know.

ILLUSTRATION – Many years ago I was subpoenaed to appear in court as a character witness in a child custody case. It was one of the most intimidating experiences of my life. I was afraid I would say the wrong thing. The attorney calmed me down by saying, "Just tell them what you know about your friend." And that's what witnessing is. Just tell them what you know about your friend Jesus. It's really very simple.

Actually you really don't get to choose whether you'll be a witness or not. The fact is, Christ-follower, you are a witness. The question is whether you're a good one or a bad one.

And Acts 1:8 is the table of contents ... the outline ... of the book of Acts, how the Gospel went first to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth. God is on an unstoppable mission. Those first followers of Jesus were super-charged with divine power. In thirty years they were able to shake the world of their day. And the equipment they had is the same equipment we have ... the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I want you to think with me for a few moments about how you and I individually and collectively should respond to this truth here on the pages of Scripture. I think it's safe to say that for most of us our lives are not as focused as we should be on what Jesus said was the main thing. Our church is not as focused as it should be on what Jesus said was the main thing. What if we just let the word of God shape our lives and our church? What if we really took Jesus and His Word seriously? Two phrases just keep coming up to me about how we must refocus. The first phrase is...

REVIVAL PRAYING

ILLUSTRATION – Many years ago there was a famous evangelist by the name of Gypsy Smith. Some of you may have heard that name. He was used by God in a mighty way to bring countless people to Christ and countless believers to a renewed devotion to Christ. One day a group of people came to Gypsy Smith and asked him how their church might experience revival. He said, "Each of you should go home to your room, close the door behind you, kneel down on the floor and with a piece of chalk draw a circle around you, then ask God to send revival in that circle."

What if we gave ourselves like never before to being wholly consecrated to God through prayer? Every great movement of God in history has always involved a group of people who got on their faces before God and cried out to Him for revival in their hearts, in their churches and in their land.

What if we watched a little less TV, spent a little less time on Facebook, and started giving a half-hour every day to seek God in His Word and in prayer? If I asked everyone who spends at least a half-hour in prayer and the Word of God every day to stand, could you stand? I think many of us would be embarrassed. But just that simple shift in priorities would mean an enormous change in our lives and in our church.

What if we made more time in the life of our church for corporate prayer? We make time for church banquets and meals. We make time for rehearsals and other meetings. What would happen if we started meeting together regularly as a church for the purpose of prayer? Whatever we have to stop doing, whatever reorganizing or rescheduling we have to do, is worth it. We must do this or miss what God wants to do for us in revival.

If we are truly zealous for the glory of God and passionate for his kingdom to advance, and if we have compassion for the lost and hurting people of our world, we will more and more want this

power and seek this power. We will cry out for it. People and churches that commit to this kind of serious seeking of God have taken quantum leaps forward in God's unstoppable mission.

So one phrase that God has branded on my heart is "Revival Praying." The other phrase that God has branded on my heart is...

"GOSPEL SATURATION"

The power of the Holy Spirit that we experience from revival praying is for a purpose ... to propel us as bold witnesses to carry out the command of Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations. We have to refocus on that agenda.

I think most of us know enough that we want to see people saved. That's a big gauge when it comes to seeing how well any church is doing. So we're eager to see the harvest; we know enough to know that's what we should be looking for.

ILLUSTRATION – But I feel like we're like a bunch of workers standing around a field waiting for wheat to start growing and producing grain. And after months of watering and plowing, with still no harvest, somehow asked, "Did it occur to anyone to plant some seeds?" There's not enough seed being planted.

What if you and I, with renewed and revived hearts, began to see ourselves as seed-sowers at school, at work, in our neighborhoods? If we start our day releasing our lives to God in prayer, and the Holy Spirit has control of our lives, don't you think that God is going to put you in the path of others who need Jesus?

What if every ministry we did as a church, no matter what it was, in some way sowed the seeds of the Gospel? We have made huge strides in making an impact in our community through the Mercy Clinic, Kids Hope, Benevolence Ministry, and so much more. These are great opportunities for us to not just help hurting people, but to sow the seeds of the Gospel. In all we do as a church there must be a clear witness of the Gospel, calling people to repentance and faith. What if every Sunday Bible Study class every week, and every Community Group meeting, had a time when you talked and prayed and dreamed about how to connect with people who need to know Jesus?

What if we looked for more opportunities to sow in fields we've never sown seed in before? What kind of harvest might we see in our Jerusalem, our Judea, our Samaria, and the ends of the earth? Starting right here in our Jerusalem, we can do this by strategically targeting parts of our city where there can be Gospel saturation. We have made great strides in doing this in our zip code of 76110. One of the next opportunities we have is the area north of our church, the Near Southside, the area between our church and downtown. What if we formed a strategy team of people who live or work in that area to develop the strategy for how to best communicate the Gospel with people who live and work there? And then we target other pockets of people.

Thinking about our Judea, Tarrant County, next year we will partner with other churches in our city to be part of something called "Explore God." It is a massive effort to utilize the media to get people

thinking about God, then to channel them into small groups in local churches to answer the questions they are asking. You'll hear more about this later.

What if we stopped seeing ourselves as a one-size, one-schedule, one-style-fits-all church? That kind of thinking ignores the vast diversity of the people we are trying to reach. If we think of them as people groups like we have overseas, each people group requires a different approach, maybe a different language, maybe a different time or style or location. We shouldn't rebuke ourselves for not being a one-size, one-style, one-location, one-time-fits-all church.

What if we think not just about what grows our church and began to think in bigger terms of what advances the Kingdom of God? For the first time in the 23 years I've been at our church we will make a significant investment in a church planting effort in the US. Former members Dave and Mary Elliff are moving to Seattle WA early next year, and we're going to help them. The Northwest is as lost as many parts of Europe and the Middle East. Of course, there are new and exciting ways for us to continue sow the seeds of the Gospel in the ends of the earth places like India, Romania, Lebanon, and Cambodia.

What if we saw the nations are coming to us? We are in one of the most ethnically diverse parts of the city. There is a great confluence of Hispanics and Asians in our part of the city. I'm excited to say that our church is starting to look more and more like our community and that is pleasing to God.

What if we all gave so generously and sacrificially that we never had to say, "We don't have the money to do that"? We have all the money we need to accomplish this unstoppable mission ... and it's in our pockets.

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

I'm greived that we have spent too much of our energy focused on things that aren't what Jesus had in mind. We have to refocus. We have spent the last three years trying to figure out how we can keep ourselves happy, singing the songs we want to sing at the time we want to sing them in the place we want to sing them. It's no wonder we feel that we're missing the power. Listen, God's power only flows in the direction of His purpose. If we aren't as focused as we should be on God's unstoppable purpose and mission, why in the world would He trust us with Holy Spirit power?

But "*what if*" can become "*what is*" when the heart and the mission of Jesus shapes all we do. We must not be afraid to let the mission of Jesus reshape and refocus us from time to time. The world we live in and the city we live is changing every day. The message doesn't need to change, but the way we deliver the message will have to change.

What if we just gave God a blank check, as individuals and a church? What if we just handed Jesus the keys to our house and to our cars? What if we handed Jesus our calendar and our checkbook? When you give someone a blank check you are saying, "I'm signing what I have over to you. Spend anything I am or anything I have for whatever you want." That's what it means to yield to the

control of the Holy Spirit of God. That’s what it will take for our church to be shaped by the heart and the mission of Jesus ... hundreds of us saying, “Here’s my blank check, Lord. Spend me any way you want.”

Take out your pen or pencil. Write the name of God on the “Pay to the Order” line. Write “My life” on the amount line. Then sign your name.

LORD’S SUPPER/BENEVOLENCE OFFERING