

Home Missions in a New Millennium

A Workshop by David Webber given at The Rural Conference, Balclutha New Zealand, June 25th – 28th 2009
Session 3: The Apostles: Answering the call to home missions.

I. Scripture

Acts 1:1-11 (NRSV)

¹ *In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**” ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”¹*

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NASB95)

⁹ *And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Philippians 4:10-13 (NASB95)

¹⁰ *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through His who strengthens me.”²*

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1996, c1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995. The Lockman Foundation: LaHabra, CA

I. INTRODUCTION

How could they possibly ever do what Jesus wanted them to do?

They were too weak ... and too flawed ... and more than anything else, too broken.

It was a Thursday when Jesus spoke to them and said to them, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8, NRSV)

Exactly six weeks before, on another Thursday, reclining at a table with Jesus, they had heard him say as he broke the bread of Passover, *‘This is my body, eat this and remember me.’*

And they heard him say over the wine, *‘This is my blood, drink it and remember me.’*

He went on to say, *‘In a few hours, they will capture me, try me, whip me and crucify me to death ... and you will all deny me and run away like sheep without a shepherd.’* (Lk.22.31)

‘You will forget me.’

And that is exactly what had happened.

Peter had spat vile cuss words three times, within the very hearing and sight of Jesus, swearing that he did not even know him (Lk.22.61).

Just hours before Peter had promised Jesus that he would gladly go to death with him if necessary (Lk.22.31-34).

But none of them were there when Jesus died.

None of them even made it to his funeral ... can you imagine that?

His funeral was left to just a few of the women who had followed him from Galilee along with Joseph of Arimathea,

Even Joseph, a member of the very Sanhedrin that had sent him to the cross, was more faithful than any of them were (Lk.23.50).

Theirs was a legacy of fear, failure, weakness and brokenness.

That was their witness.

And everybody in Jerusalem knew it

How could they possibly ever be his witnesses to Jerusalem, let alone Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth?

Fear, failure, weakness and brokenness ... and a complete lack of credibility ... that is all they had to offer.

III. THE TEXT (Acts 1.8)

A. Brokenness

Charles Price, senior pastor of the People's Church in Toronto and one of our better Canadian preachers, postulated that if Jesus really wanted to get the job of witnessing done he should have assigned it to a couple of angels, perhaps three ... and definitely not to the eleven apostles, and the millions of disciples who would come after them.³

After all, a couple of angels would have certain travel advantages for the mission field... they could just arrive, on angel's wings so to speak.

And talk about credibility.

They could knock on a door ... say 'could we tell you about Jesus' ... and then for effect do something angelic, like suddenly flash their wings or something.

And of course they would not have all the deficits of fear, failure, weakness and all the other components of human brokenness to contend with.

But that is not the way of the Risen Christ.

From the very start of God's mission in him, until right now, human brokenness has been a requirement for mission and service.

The Apostle Paul knew this first hand.

He had to contend with his weakness as he sought to serve Jesus as a witness.

One of his weaknesses he called his "thorn in the flesh", and though we don't know what exactly it was, he wrote about how he learned its purpose in his mission: *"Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, NASB95)⁴

³ I acknowledge Charles Price's fingerprints on many of the ideas expressed in this address. Dave Webber.

⁴ New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995. The Lockman Foundation: LaHabra, CA

God's way in Christ is to use human brokenness and weakness in the act of bearing witness to his Son.

That is God's program.

And if we are not prepared to get with the program, and are going to continue to insist doing mission out of our own strength, we will not be much use to Christ nor very effective for him.

I'll go further, if we are not prepared to be broken for him in the act of bearing witness to him, we are probably not going to get the job, let alone get the job done.

Doing mission out of our own strength is going to fall flat on its face, and I expect you and I will fall flat on our faces in the process.

The word used in the Greek text for witness is the word μάρτυς (*martus*) from which we get our word martyr.

Inherent in that very word is brokenness.

It really means one who, after the example of Jesus, has proved the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ by becoming broken.⁵

I am not quite sure how we figured we could be μάρτυς, (*martus*) witnesses without being broken.

It's a part of the program.

I am going to go further than that ... for those of us who follow Christ into bearing witness for him ... it is the program.

Brokenness, rather than disqualifying us for mission and ministry, qualifies us for it.

B. Surrender

So in today's text Christ gives the program, '*Out of and in your brokenness you will bear witness for me in all the world.*'

That is the program of the Risen Christ.

Given this, today's text says: "*Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." " ... "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses ... "*" (Acts 1:4-5,8 NASB95)

⁵Strong, J. 1996. *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) . Woodside Bible Fellowship.: Ontario

‘Do not leave Jerusalem.’

‘You will receive power.’

You will be broken ... but you will receive power.

Now that sounds pretty good.

The word used for power in the original Greek is that wonderful word *δύναμις* (*dunamis*) from which we get several English words ... words like dynamo, dynamite, dynamism, dynamic. “⁶

It means raw power, kinetic energy.

And Jesus says to the disciples, ‘*You don’t have it in yourself, but you will get it from God via God’s Holy Spirit.*’

‘*You are broken, but you will be filled with divine power.*’

Now there is something going on here that is real easy to miss.

This power is coming from the Risen Christ, by way of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

But power by itself is not enough to get the mission witness task done, at least not to get it done right.

There is an absolute need for authority and accountability.

In another place where the Risen Christ is mustering his apostles to send them out on their mission, namely in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is quoted as saying, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...*” (*Matthew 28:18b-19a, NRSV*)⁷

The mission of the apostles happens under the authority divinely given to the Risen Christ.

To do the job they have to absolutely come under his authority.

They can only function as witnesses and make disciples for him working under his authority.

To work under his authority they must surrender to his authority and be absolutely accountable to him.

The Holy Spirit power promised from on high, for the purpose of being Christ’s witnesses, carries with it that proviso.

There is a requirement to surrender to the authority of Christ and to be accountable to him in order to receive Holy Spirit power.

⁶Strong, J. 1996. *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) . Woodside Bible Fellowship.: Ontario

⁷ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version.* 1996, c1989. Thomas Nelson: Nashville

Power given without authority and accountability is extremely dangerous. The best example that most of us could come up with regarding power without divine authority and accountability is 911.

That horrible event was power rampaging without authority and accountability to a benevolent divine being.

Another example is Timothy McVeigh who called himself a Christian libertarian and on April 19th, 1995, detonated a van full of explosives leveling the Federal Building in Oklahoma City killing 168 people and injuring over 800 others, all innocent victims of McVeigh's protest over the federal agents handling of the Waco Texas siege and the Ruby Ridge Idaho siege ... both of which had seemingly apparent Christian connections.

McVeigh had all the power to do what he wanted.

He had been trained by the army to do it well ... as well as how to gain access to enough nitro methane and ammonium nitrate to build a truck bomb that was equivalent to 5000 lbs of TNT.

But he did not have the authority of the army to exercise that power.

And he most certainly did not have the authority of Christ to exercise that power, in spite of what he said.

He was not in surrender to Christ.

Tragedy ensued.

Power that is not in surrender to authority and accountability is always dangerous.

The power that Jesus promises is given to the broken apostles only in as much as they are surrendered to his authority.

It is crucial that we understand this

There is a chain of command that is necessary for his apostles and disciples to understand ... and to submit to.

The commission to the apostles and the promise of power from on high is given, and only given, within the command structure, or authority of God.

Jesus is absolutely under the authority of God, which is what the cross makes explicitly clear.

Jesus went to the cross completely in surrender to the authority of God.

He did so with the words on his lips ... *not my will, but thine, be done.*" (Luke 22:42, KJV) ⁸

And it is because, and only because of his surrender to the authority of God, that he is Risen, and given the authority of God as Risen Lord.

And it is only when his disciples, then and now, are in surrender to the person and exclusive reign of the Risen Christ, that God will give them Holy Spirit power.

We can't handle Holy Spirit power on our own authority.

We will mess it up.

We have to be surrendered to Christ.

This is crucial for us to understand in order to access the power promised from on high, Holy Spirit power.

And without that power we are not going to get anything done by way of the mission of bearing witness.

C. Out the back door

So human brokenness is required in the witnessing-mission program of the Risen Christ.

I didn't particularly want to hear that.

I am not partial to brokenness.

And absolute surrender is crucial in receiving dynamic Holy Spirit power from Christ to get the job done.

I didn't want to hear that either.

I am not particularly good at surrendering, particularly to someone else's authority.

And the third thing I didn't want to hear is what Christ has in store in terms of getting started.

Jesus says to His disciples: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8, NRSV) ⁹

I don't think the disciples wanted to hear that either.

Most everyone in Jerusalem knew of their failure.

And yet it is to Jerusalem where they are told to go first.

"But Jesus, can't you send me out to where no one knows me?"

⁸ *The Holy Bible : King James Version*. 1995. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

⁹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1996, c1989. Thomas Nelson: Nashville

“Let me start there.”

“Let me start where I haven’t soiled my reputation.”

And Jesus says *‘Start in Jerusalem where everyone knows you ... where every one knows your reputation.’*

Charles Price, Canadian preacher and author of several good books, imagines that this was like Jesus saying to his disciples:¹⁰

Peter, you know that woman that you swore at, the one when I turned and looked at you as you were denying me with your foul mouth? Would you go and find her in Jerusalem? And would you tell her that I am Risen?

And Simon, you have been a member of the Zealot underground for ages. Remember Barabus, the zealot and robber that everyone is afraid of and whom people were more inclined to have set free than me? You can find him hiding out in the underground. Go and tell Barabus that I died for him ... that I die twice for him ... once to save his life for the day, and once to save his life forever.

And John, you were at the cross almost until I died. Remember that Roman Centurion? Yes I know he is the enemy, but when I died he said “surely this is the Son of God.” Would you go to where Pilate is and find that man in his praetorian guard? And would you tell him he was so right and what it means?

You get the point don’t you?

The apostolic witness program is to witness for the Risen Christ out of our **brokenness**.

The power to do so comes completely from God ... but only in as much as we are in **surrender** to the authority of the Risen Christ.

That is the nature of Holy Spirit power.

And the procedure is to begin right **out our back door**, to begin where every one knows us, to begin where our life is an open book.

Yes I know that can be embarrassing.

At least it is for me

My neighbor hears me when I forget and yell at the kids, and sometimes my lovely wife.

¹⁰ I acknowledge Charles Price’s fingerprints on many of the ideas expressed in this address. Dave Webber.

My neighbor sees when the dog comes flying out the door to the sound of screamed obscenities and a flying broom.
He sees me cleaning dog poop off the lawn and hurling it over the lilac trees onto his lawn.
My neighbor is more aware of my human failings than most anybody.
But that makes the gospel of the Risen Christ that much more compelling, for it is all about saving us in the midst of our human failings.

III. Conclusion

So who are the apostle, the sent ones, the missionary witnesses?
Notice in the text we are listening to today that Jesus does not say to the apostles, you will receive power and you may be my witness, or you can be my witnesses or you can choose to be my witnesses.
Neither does he say, some of you may be, or some of you can be or some of you can chose to be my witnesses.
Jesus is very explicit, you will receive Holy Spirit power and *you will be my witnesses.*”

There is no receiving the power and then making a choice about what to do with it.

The power is given expressly for being a witness, period.
And filled with the Holy Spirit you will be his witness, period.
And the “you” is an inclusive “you.”
If Jesus was a Texan he would have said ‘ya’all will be my witnesses.’

So here’s the thing.

Not some, but all.

Not may be, but will be.

In terms of the huge mission field at our doorstep, we have seen the apostles, the sent ones, and we are they.

In terms of the huge mission field at our doorstep, we have seen the apostolic work of bearing witness to Christ, and it is ours.

It is ours as individual believers.

It is ours as communities of faith.

Individually, and as community, the apostolic work of bearing witness to Jesus to those outside the fellowship of Christ, is our work.

When we begin to understand this and begin to act upon this, amazing things begin to happen.

After tea, I want us to reconvene and to tell stories to one another about how we have seen these amazing things happen, in terms of our apostolic work of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, our mission. We do this by way of encouraging one another in the work. So while you are having tea and a good yak, have this in the back of your mind.

To get us to teatime, I will tell an example story.

IV. Epilogue: Colin and the Goat-man

It was Tuesday, so that meant it was Mcleese Lake.

Colin, a cattle rancher in our Mcleese Lake house church pulled me aside after our worship time, which in this house church typically goes on for two hours before we continue fellowship over coffee and pastery.

“The Goat-man is dying,” Colin said.

I said, “What? Who is the Goat-man?”

“I don’t know what his name is,” Colin said.

“Everybody just calls him the Goat-man.

He is an old guy who lives by himself up back of Mcleese Lake in a run down old shack and he raises a few goats.

He’s sort of an old derelict of a guy that kinda looks like his goats, some say smells a little like them too.

I never met him but my neighbor told me he has cancer and he is dying.

Could you go and visit him?”

I looked at Colin, and smiled.

I knew the way someone else’s sickness and death makes us face our own, and just how uncomfortable that can be.

“I could, but I won’t,” I said

“You go visit him.”

We prayed that night for the Goat-man, and for Colin, and for the Holy Spirit.

Next week Colin said, “I been to see the Goat-man and is he ever sick.

I think it’s some kind of stomach cancer and he is just withering away.

We talked quite a while about this and that.

I invited him to church, but he politely declined.

When I left I asked him if he would mind if we prayed for him at church. He said he thought he could use all the help he could get.”

We prayed for the Goat-man that night at church, and for Colin.

The next week was virtually a repeat of this conversation, and so was the week after that, and the week after that, and the week after that.

On one of these chats, Colin reported on his last trip up to the Goat-man. He was now confined to bed in his shack and one of the neighbor ladies, who made it clear she was not a Christian, was going up to the Goat-man’s shack to care for him about 3 times a day.

Colin visited with the Goat-man and talked about this and that.

Finally he mustered up the nerve to ask the Goat-man if he had ever accepted Jesus.

The Goat man said he never had, and wanted to hear some more.

Colin told him some more, about Jesus, about salvation, just some basic stuff.

The Goat man said he thought he’d better accept Jesus right now because he didn’t think he had a whole lot of time to think about it.

Colin prayed with the Goat-man about accepting Jesus and the woman who said she didn’t believe looked on with intrigue through a corner of the door curtain.

The next week Colin said to me, “The Goat-man wants to be baptized.”

I said, “When?”

Colin said, “Soon.”

“He is in Williams Lake in the hospital and he only has a few days left.”

The next day I met Colin in William’s Lake in the Goat-man’s hospital room. John and Jim, a couple of other rancher types who had started visiting the Goat-man as well were there from our McLeese Lake house church. If I remember right, I think the good neighbor who said she didn’t believe in Jesus was there too.

I asked a nurse for a stainless-steel bowl of warm water.

We gathered around the Goat-man’s bed, sang a hymn that the Goat-man knew from somewhere in his past, read a Scripture and prayed.

When I asked him the questions of baptism, great tears welled up in his eyes as he nodded his answers.

He could no longer speak.

We baptized the Goat-man with water and we all laid hands on him and prayed.

There was more than a few tears and I heard several sniffles from behind me.

All the nurses from the ward and several ambulatory patients were crammed in the doorway and foyer of the Goat-man's room.

The next day the Goat-man passed peacefully into the arms of Jesus.

One of the nurses told Colin that the Goat-man never stopped glowing from the time he was baptized until he stopped breathing.

At the Goat-man's request, Colin did his funeral service a few days later in the community hall at Mcleese Lake.

It was his first funeral, both the Goat-man's and Colin's

Most of the community attended.

By the way, I found out the Goat-man's name when I later filled out the baptismal register.

It was Donald Reesor.

Look him up when you get to heaven.

V. Questions, Insights ... Tea ... Story Telling.

A. Jody and Hospice. Tell how Jody felt compelled to reach out to the broken on her doorstep, how she ended up volunteering with Hospice in the hospital in town, how this put her face to with a client who was strongly anti Christian but was terrified of dying due to a deep seated fear of flames and being buried in the earth, how this fear cut Jody to the quick and deeply touched her heart and put her in touch with her own brokenness as well as her human powerlessness to do anything for the woman, and how God used this brokenness and powerlessness to drive Jody to pray for herself and for the woman openly (with her permission) and how she literally prayed the woman into heaven ... her prayers spawned by her own brokenness and surrender to Christ conveyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the woman.

B. Pete and the BC Cattlemen's Association. Tell how Pete who was a director for the provincial cattlemen's association felt moved to

somehow bring a Christian witness to the people of his professional community who were on the ropes due to the full effect of 5 years of BSE and drought. Pete was also on the ropes due to this crisis and was somewhat intimidated by the prospect of reaching out to this group that is often considered pretty hard nosed. Tell how he and Nikki prayed about it and surrendered it to Christ. Tell how they bought a table at the Trade Show at the AGM and how we as a faith community rallied behind Pete's burden and manned the table, provided counseling, handed out bibles and provided other resources. Tell about how this was the first time any church had ever shown any interest or became a Christian witness at a BC Cattlemen's Association AGM. An example of the apostolic community.